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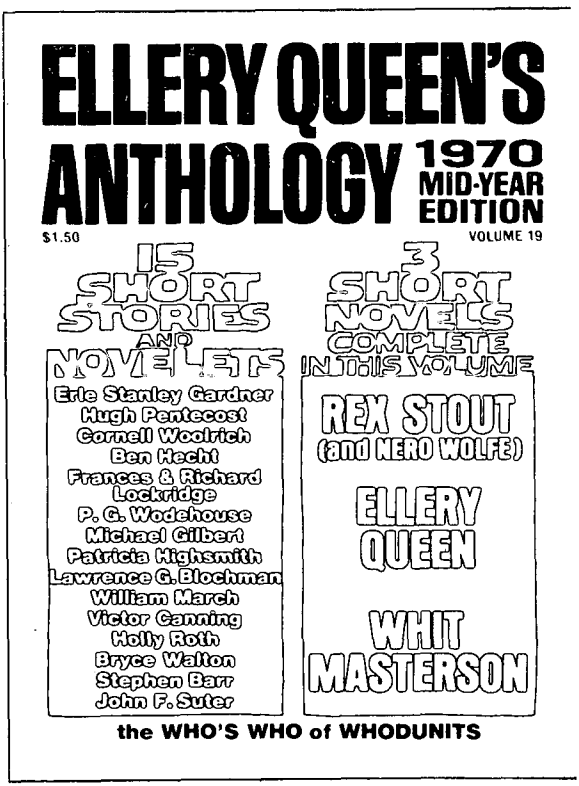

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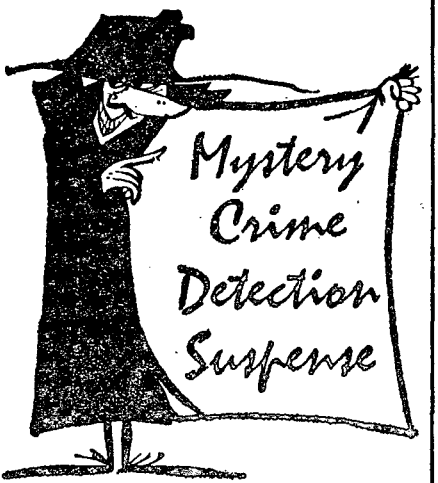

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The pattern was there, the modus operandi was always the same—an armed holdup in daylight, in the rain. But they could never catch him. Each time he managed to slip away . . .

The elusive rainy-day bandit was not Captain Leopold's concern. The Captain knew about the case—everybody did; but Leopold was head of Homicide, and he'd get into the high-stakes game only if the bandit raised the ante—from robbery to murder . . . .

THE RAINY-DAY BANDIT

by EDWARD D. HOCH

SAM THE CLEAN-UP MAN took Captain Leopold's car and anchored it firmly to the endless chain that would carry it through the steaming, splashing suds of the car wash. "How are you today, Captain?" Sam shouted above the roar of machinery.

"Good as could be expected on a Monday morning," Leopold shouted back. "Don't know why—I'm getting it washed. Looks like it's going to rain any minute."

Sam squinted at the leaden sky and walked over to Leopold's side. "Sure hope not. I need a full week's work to pay my taxes."

Leopold nodded sympathetically. The 15th of April was only a week away, and with the extra surtax this year it was hurting everybody. He found himself reluctant even to pay out the cost of the car wash, wondering why he didn't sometimes chisel a bit like everyone else and have it cleaned at the city garage along with the official detective cars.

It was that sort of day, and it lasted even after he'd waved goodbye to Sam and the other workmen and wheeled out onto the street, heading downtown. In the other lane he noticed an unmarked police car with a detective from Robbery at the wheel. Tommy Gibson. A nice guy, someone everybody liked, but who

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was not above taking a little graft on the side. There were a few others like him in the department, but they were not really Leopold's concern as head of Homicide. Tommy Gibson could take his petty graft. As for Leopold, he'd still pay for his own car wash.

Sergeant Fletcher was already in the office with Leopold's coffee, and that made him feel a bit better. "You're late, Captain."

"Stopped to get my car washed. Saw Tommy Gibson on the way in. What's he up to these days?"

Fletcher sipped his own coffee from the paper cup. "Robbery, same as always. He's in charge of this holdup investigation right now. Probably hoping it won't rain today."

"The rainy-day bandit?" Although robbery was not directly in Leopold's province, he was aware of the crimes, as was everyone else in the city. Perhaps that was why Tommy Gibson was out cruising on a threatening Monday morning in April.

The first robbery had been a small-time affair—the stickup of a parking-meter collector during a chilling rainstorm back in January. It was followed three weeks later by one a little more daring—a gas-station holdup. Then came an insurance office, and the branch of a bank, and most recently a wealthy gambler on his way to the bank with a deposit. The crimes were identical in their execution. The day—for they were always daylight crimes—was dark and overcast, with a heavy rain falling. The bandit wore a cloth mask that covered his entire face, and he carried a shiny nickel-plated revolver. Not one of the five victims doubted he would have shot any one of them dead at the first indication of resistance. In the case of the bank robbery—the bandit's most profitable venture to date—he'd actually knocked two people to the floor as he dashed for the street.

"The Commissioner's pushing Tommy for an arrest," Fletcher said. "This is the sort of thing the newspapers love. Since he robbed that gambler last week, they're almost beginning to treat him like a modern Robin Hood."

"He's getting more active with the spring rains," Leopold observed. "Two holdups so far this month, and it's only the eighth."

There'd been an early Easter this year, and an early spring. Somehow the whole year seemed hurried, as if racing toward summer. Fletcher put down his coffee. "Well, at least it's no concern of ours."

"No," Leopold agreed. "Not unless he kills someone."

The rain started in mid-afternoon, driving hard out of the west. It sent pedestrians scattering

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and slowed traffic to a crawl. Captain Leopold looked up once from the autopsy report on his desk to watch it beating on his windows, but then he went back to work and paid no more attention to the downpour. After five o'clock it settled into a steady drizzle that promised to last the night.

It was nearly six when Sergeant Fletcher poked his head around the corner of the door. "You still here, Captain?"

"Going home soon."

"Tommy Gibson's rainy-day bandit hit again."

"Oh? Where?"

"A shopping center on Millrose. Around an hour ago. Cleaned out six cash registers in a supermarket while fifty people watched. The guy's got guts, you have to say that!"

"He takes too many chances," Leopold said sourly. "Some day an eager citizen's going to jump him, and then we'll either have a captured bandit or a dead hero."

The rain lasted through the night as expected. It was still coming down in the morning, although it had tapered off to a damp drizzle that was more annoying than anything else. Leopold was at his desk early, before eight, and he was just beginning to think about his morning coffee when the call came in to Fletcher's desk.

"We've got a killing, Captain," Fletcher said, already reaching for his raincoat. "Want to come along? The cop who called in thinks it might have been the rainy-day bandit."

Leopold nodded. "Let's go."

The dead man was sprawled in an alley on Carter Street, his body wet from rain, his eyes staring unseeing at the leaden sky. He'd been shot once in the left temple, and there was no sign of the gun. Leopold glanced at the body and then looked around at the little group of men. He saw Tommy Gibson at once.

"This a rainy-day bandit caper, Tommy?"

"Looks like it, Captain. Victim's name is James Mercer. He was an insurance agent making collections in the neighborhood. The money's gone, though."

"Anybody see it happen?"

Gibson glanced up at the empty windows. "Not in this neighborhood. They're mostly first-generation Americans, a lot of them on welfare. They never see a thing."

Leopold nodded. "It could be your bandit. But it could be anybody. Does he have a list of his collection stops?"

Sergeant Fletcher had been going quickly through the pockets of the dead man's soggy topcoat. "This might be what you want, Captain."

There were twenty-one names

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and addresses in the little notebook, each with an amount and a series of dates written after it. Eleven of them had been checked off. "He didn't collect much," Leopold observed, adding quickly, "About fifty bucks."

"Where do we start?" Fletcher wanted to know.

"At the last name he checked off. Rose Sweeney. It's just down the street."

They left the body in the care of the technical men with their cameras and plastic bags and went in search of Rose Sweeney. She proved to be a buxom woman of forty or so, with graying hair and thick, round glasses that gave her the look of a startled owl. Her apartment was cluttered with the flotsam of a lifetime, piled here and there on tables as if she'd just moved in. Through it all, she seemed to feel her way as she directed them to dusty chairs.

"Yes," she said in answer to their first question, "that nice Mr. Mercer was here for his money just about an hour ago."

"Did he seem upset, nervous?"

"No, just quiet. More quiet than usual, I'd say. I gave him the money—four dollars—and he left right away."

"Did he always come at the same time?"

She blinked her eyes and nodded. "Every other Tuesday morning, first thing. Right after he calls on Mr. Tydings down the street. What's the matter? Is something wrong?" She looked from one to the other, seeming to smell the odor of panic they'd brought with them to her cluttered apartment.

When they left Rose Sweeney, Leopold sent Fletcher to check on the apartment houses across the street while he continued down the block to the little clapboard cottage owned by Mr. Tydings. In its day, when the area had prided itself on horse-drawn carriages and a good view of the river a few miles below, the cottage had probably been a little gem set among the larger homes. Now, with the area racially mixed, with Polish and Irish and Negro and Puerto Rican workers living in what had originally been the Italian section of town, the cottage had taken on a shabby appearance.

And George Tydings himself was no less shabby. He needed a shave, and his pale thin hands shook with the effects of some early-morning drinking. The bottle, cheap vodka, was still visible on the kitchen table. "What is it?" he asked tiredly. "What's all the trouble?"

"There's been a shooting," Leopold told him, getting directly to it. "The insurance man—James Mercer. I understand he called on you earlier this morning."

"Sure. He was here. I paid him my money and he left."

"Nothing unusual?"

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"He seemed the same as always."

"And you saw nothing through your windows?"

"Not a thing." He wandered back out to the kitchen, seeking his bottle. Leopold watched him weave carefully around a low bookcase that partially blocked the kitchen door. While Tydings poured himself a drink from the bottle, Leopold glanced at the ragged paperbound books that filled the case. But there was nothing unusual—mysteries, science fiction, a few modern novels by Roth and Bellow and Updike, a book on ventriloquism, and another on bricklaying. In a mystery novel that would have been a clue, and Leopold found his mind concocting strange combinations—a voice from inside a walled-up tomb, with some sort of Poesque twist at the end. A ventriloquist kills his wife, then—

"Want a drink?" George Tydings called from the kitchen table.

"Too early in the day," Leopold said. "You a bricklayer?"

"Huh? Oh, the book. I was going to put a barbecue pit in the back yard. Never got around to it. Neighborhood's going to pot. So why bother?" He came back in, moving again around the awkwardly placed bookcase.

"Live here alone?"

A nod. "Since my wife left me. She fooled around with the milkman—would you believe it, the *milkman?*—and I finally tossed her out. Lost my job last week, too."

"Sorry to hear that."

Tydings seemed suddenly sad and sober. "Had a good job, too. I went to college for two years. Wouldn't believe it now, would you?"

Leopold let himself out the front door and walked around the back of the cottage, through weeds and grass coming alive with the rains of spring. There was no barbecue pit. He walked farther, to a rear alley, and followed it behind an apartment building to the alley where Mercer's body had been found Sergeant Fletcher was there waiting for him, but by now the body had been taken away.

"Find anything, Captain?"

"Probably nothing. Check on a man named Tydings, especially on a wife who's supposed to have left him recently. And while you're at it, do a check on Rose Sweeney." He glanced down at the alley pavement where the body had been lying. "How about you? Anything?"

"Maybe," Fletcher answered. "You should talk to him."

"Him? Who?"

"Name's Kansas Johnson—lives across the street. He was next on the collection list, but Mercer never got there."

Johnson was standing tall and silent in the street with one of

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the uniformed patrolmen. "You Kansas Johnson?" Leopold asked.

"That's me."

"What did you see?"

"Nothin'."

Leopold turned to Fletcher. "Well?"

"He had a fight with Mercer last month when he came to collect. Punched him in the jaw."

Johnson shifted his feet. "Not hard. I just tapped him. He came up behind me in the street and grabbed my shoulder. I didn't know who it was at first. Hell, I paid him the money and said I was sorry."

"And you didn't see him today?"

"No, sir."

Leopold sighed, then turned to Fletcher. "You'd better get a full statement from him about the incident last month. Then see what else you can find around here. I'm going back downtown."

It was mid-afternoon when James Mercer's widow arrived with her brother to identify the body. She was a handsome woman with faded blonde hair and what was still a good figure. Leopold questioned her briefly. It was a part of the job he never liked.

"Mrs. Mercer, did your husband have any enemies?"

"None. Everyone liked him."

"Did he say anything about a fight he had with a man named Kansas Johnson a few weeks back?"

"No. He didn't tell me much."

"Do you have any children?"

"A son away at college."

The brother cleared his throat. "Mrs. Mercer is highly distraught, Captain. Is all this questioning necessary?"

"I'm sorry," Leopold agreed. "That will be all. If you will just identify the body—"

Later, when Leopold was alone again, Tommy Gibson strolled into the office. "I guess you're in on the big bandit hunt too, Captain."

"If the bandit did it."

"It sure looks like him from where I stand. Fits him like a glove."

"Except how did he know Mercer was collecting?"

Tommy Gibson dropped into a chair and lit a cigarette. "What the hell! He knew Mercer, or he followed him. I don't know! I just know I'd bet my badge it's the rainy-day bandit."

"Look," Leopold tried to reason, "would Mercer be the type to jump a man with a gun?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Last month a fellow named Johnson punched him and apparently Mercer didn't hit back. He doesn't sound like the sort to go after a man with a gun."

Sergeant Fletcher came in then, his coat dripping from the renewed rain. "I think we'll need an

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ark to get home tonight," he grumbled. "Hi, Tommy."

Leopold leaned back in his chair. "What's the report?"

"I've got lots of info, but none of it's much good. The fight between Mercer and Kansas was strictly a one-punch affair, a misunderstanding. Nothing to it. And Tydings' wife really left him. She's living in Boston."

Leopold nodded. "Anything else?"

"The woman, Rose Sweeney—she's legally blind."

"What?"

"Oh, she can see a little with those thick glasses—shapes and things—but the neighbors claim it's bad enough to get her a pension for being blind."

"Then she might not have seen the killer if he was right behind Mercer."

"Probably not," Fletcher agreed.

Leopold didn't like it. "What about the bullet?" he asked.

"A .38. It could have come from the type of gun the rainy-day bandit always carries."

Leopold knew the type of gun. He kept one locked in the glove compartment of his car, though he'd never had—to use it. "Anything else?"

"Nothing much. Except that he wasn't killed where we found the body."

Leopold wasn't sure he'd heard correctly. "What?"

"He wasn't killed there. Not enough blood. And the soles of his shoes were dry. He was shot somewhere else and dropped there."

"Oh."

"What do you think, Captain?"

Leopold reached for a cigarette. He rarely smoked these days, but he needed one just then. "I think that pretty much rules out the rainy-day bandit."

Tommy Gibson grunted agreement. "It might rule out robbery as a motive, too."

"He's right," Leopold told Fletcher. "A robber wouldn't bother moving the body."

"So where are we?"

"Nowhere," Leopold admitted. "Start checking the usual angles—wife, brother-in-law. And go talk to that Rose Sweeney again. Whatever happened, it was after he left her apartment."

It was raining harder when Leopold headed home, a little after nine.

At eight o'clock the following morning it was still raining although the weather forecast was optimistic for the afternoon. Leopold had left his lonely apartment early, as was his habit when working on a difficult case. Fletcher had a wife and children to occupy him at home, and Leopold didn't mind doing a bit of the legwork at times like this. He was well aware that only a

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political expediency had brought him the rank of captain in the first place. In another time, another city, he would have ranked no higher than Tommy Gibson's lieutenancy.

But there were certain privileges that came with the rank of captain. If they didn't extend to a free car wash at the headquarters garage, they did include a police radio installed under the dashboard of his own car. Now, flipping it on through habit, he heard a routine report of a robbery in progress. "All cars, all cars! Masked man observed entering all-night diner at Fifth and Lakefront. Proceed with caution. May be rainy-day bandit."

Leopold glanced at the street sign and realized he was only four blocks from the scene. He gunned the motor and raced down a side street.

The pavement on Lakefront was slick from the rain as he turned into it on two wheels, almost overturning. He slowed his speed as the diner came into view, then saw the masked figure dart from the doorway. The man saw and recognized him, and now he broke into a run, heading across a field.

Leopold skidded the car to a stop and jumped out, tugging at his service revolver. "Stop or I'll shoot!" he shouted into the morning air.

The masked bandit turned and brought up the familiar nickel-plated revolver. But then suddenly he slipped on the wet grass and the gun roared harmlessly into the air. Leopold knelt and fired once and thought he'd hit the mark, but the bandit scrambled to his feet and was off and running again. Leopold fired once more and missed, then saw a police car pull up on the side street and two officers joined in the chase. It seemed for a moment that the masked man was trapped. They had backed him against a rain-flooded creek that was surely too wide to jump.

But again he fooled them. He launched himself across the water with a flying leap as Leopold and the officers all fired. The three bullets might have been made of putty. The bandit glanced back once, then vanished into the woods beyond the creek.

Leopold shouted at the nearest officer. "Captain Leopold Homicide! Get back to your car and call for help. Try to head him off on the other side of the woods. We might have a chance of catching him."

"The guy's a damned phantom!"

"That's the reputation he's got," Leopold said, brushing off his trousers under the raincoat. "You were just shooting at the rainy-day bandit."

"I'll be damned!"

"But I think he dropped

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something when he fell." Leopold headed back for the spot in the grass and after a moment's searching found it. "His gun!" He picked up the revolver carefully, hoping for prints but knowing it was probably useless.

"Think that'll help identify him, Captain?" one of the officers asked.

"I don't know. But at least it'll tell me whether or not he killed a man named James Mercer."

Fletcher phoned in just after lunch. "Hey, Captain, the sun's shining out here!"

Leopold grunted. "Where are you—Florida?"

"Would you believe Centerville?"

"I'd believe anything. But why Centerville?"

"Checking on Mercer's brother-in-law. He lives over here. He's clear, though. He was in his office all morning till his sister called him about the murder."

"It was worth checking anyway. When you come in I'll tell you about my shoot-out with the rainy-day bandit."

"You got him?"

"No."

"Oh."

"But I'll tell you about it." He hung up and went to look out the window, seeking some break in the clouds to the west. After all, Centerville wasn't that far away.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Tommy."

Lieutenant Gibson placed a typed report carefully on Leopold's desk. "It's the ballistics check on the bandit's revolver."

"Same gun that killed James Mercer?"

"No. Nothing like it."

When Gibson didn't move away from the desk, Leopold turned from the window. "Then what's the trouble, man? Why are you standing there like that?"

"It's just that—well, I think you must have gotten the weapons confused, Captain."

"Confused?"

"We checked the ownership on the gun—and it's registered to you."

"To me!" Leopold snorted. "That's impossible! I fired at him with my service revolver. It doesn't look anything like this weapon."

But Gibson stood firm. "Nevertheless, Captain, the serial number shows the gun's been registered to you for three years."

"Let me see that!" Leopold snatched both report and weapon. The gun did look familiar. Too familiar. He wondered why he hadn't realized it when he picked it up from the grass. "It was stolen from me," he said quietly.

Tommy Gibson frowned. "By someone in the department, Captain? I hope you don't mean—"

The telephone rang and

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Leopold answered it. "Yes? Leopold here."

"Captain, we just got a trouble call from a Miss Rose Sweeney on Carter Street. She asked for you."

"I'm on my way," Leopold almost shouted. Outside, the sun had finally broken through the clouds.

He parked in a puddle outside her apartment, thankful that a patrol car was already on the scene. Rose Sweeney was inside with the officer, tears rolling from behind the thick glasses that covered her eyes. "He tried to kill me," she sobbed. "I opened the door and he grabbed at my throat!"

"Who was it, Miss Sweeney?"

"I couldn't see. Just a shape in the doorway. When I started screaming he ran away."

"Come on," Leopold told the officer. "I've got a hunch."

He led the way down the street, aware of the sunlight reflecting on the puddles of water, more aware of the curtains moving in windows as the people of Carter Street watched this latest incident. He recognized Kansas Johnson across the way, ducking into an alley between two apartment buildings.

They reached the little cottage of George Tydings just as he was closing the front door. Leopold hit the door with his shoulder and pushed it open. "Hello again, Mr. Tydings."

"What do you want now? What is all this?"

"A little conversation, that's all." Leopold saw the suitcase half packed on the floor. "You weren't thinking of taking a trip, were you?"

"I—"

Then Leopold said to the officer, "Move that bookcase aside and see if there's a bloodstain on the rug under it."

George Tydings took a step backward, and then seemed about to spring on them. But all at once he collapsed into sobs. "All right, I did it! I killed him!"

Leopold cleared his throat. "I must warn you of your rights under the law. You need make no statement until your lawyer is present."

"What difference does it make? I killed him. I dropped the gun down the sewer in the back alley." He sat down at the table, looking up at Leopold. "How'd you know about the bloodstain?"

"The bookcase was half blocking the kitchen door. It just seemed out of place on my earlier visit. When I learned that Mercer had been killed elsewhere, a hidden bloodstain seemed at least a possibility. You killed him here, then carried his body out the back door and through the alleys to where it was found. I took the route myself the other morning.

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Once you'd killed him, you hit on a clever gimmick that almost worked. You knew he collected from Rose Sweeney next, and you knew she was almost blind—could distinguish only shapes. So you went there, pretending to be Mercer, and collected her money. You wanted it to appear that the killing took place after he left your cottage. You're interested in ventriloquism, so I assume you could change your voice enough to approximate Mercer's. Besides, she said he was quiet that day. Only you began to worry that she'd recognized you after all, and so you tried to kill her just now."

Tydings had buried his head in his hands. "You don't know how it was," he sobbed.

"I think I can guess," Leopold said. "You stole the collection money to make it look like the work of the rainy-day bandit, but in reality your motive was quite different. You told us your wife was fooling around with the milkman. It's not too far-fetched to suppose she was fooling around with the insurance man too when he dropped by. Perhaps he admitted it when you accused him, or perhaps you didn't need an admission to believe the worst and kill him."

"Yes," Tydings mumbled. "Yes." Leopold wasn't sure which question he was answering, which guilt he was admitting. But it really didn't matter any more.

Tommy Gibson came in the following morning while Leopold and Fletcher were having their morning coffee. "You did mighty nice work on that Mercer killing, Captain."

"That type's never difficult. He was almost anxious to confess. I'm surprised he didn't admit it the first time I questioned him."

Gibson nodded. "I'm sort of sorry he didn't turn out to be my bandit, though. We're as much at a dead end as ever on that."

Leopold smiled. "Pray for sunshine, and that he doesn't find another gun. Maybe he'll know when his luck has run out."

"What do you think he does on days when the sun shines?" Fletcher asked.

"If we knew that—" Leopold began.

And then suddenly he knew.

Sam the clean-up man was waiting to take the car from Leopold when the Captain wheeled it into line at the car wash. "Twice in one week, Captain! The rain really gets 'em dirty."

"Sure does," Leopold agreed, sliding out of the seat.

Sam was halfway in when he saw the nickel-plated revolver lying on the passenger's seat. He hesitated, then looked up at Leopold. "What's this?"

"I think you dropped that, Sam, after you tried to shoot me with it."

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Sam cursed and lunged for the gun, but Leopold landed on top of him. They tumbled out of the car together, but Sam broke free and started for the rear entrance, then saw Fletcher and Gibson coming in that way. He turned and ran down the track that carried the cars through the mammoth washing cycle.

Leopold felt the sudsy water hit his face as he pounded after the fleeing man. He caught him with a flying tackle just by the big soft rollers that enveloped the cars. They skidded together in the soapy water, then banged against the hot-air drying vents. Sam made one last effort to break free, but a gush of rinse water threw him off balance. He skidded, went down hard, and then Fletcher and Gibson and Leopold were all on top of him.

"Too much water," Fletcher grinned as he snapped on the handcuffs. "And I thought you liked the rain so much."

Sam glared at Leopold and spat. "How'd you get me, copper?"

"You were using my gun all the time. I had it locked in my glove compartment and hadn't even looked at it in months. I was wondering who could have stolen it without leaving traces of a break-in, and then I remembered you, Sam. Every week you took the car from me and started it through the wash. It was a simple job of ten seconds for you to remove the bunch of keys from the ignition, unlock the glove compartment, take what you wanted, and lock it again. You could have done it without even shifting your position much behind the wheel. I suppose you did it to hundreds of cars while you emptied their ashtrays and cleaned their inside windows. When you stole the gun from me, that must have given you the idea to go on to bigger things."

"I should have killed you yesterday."

"You tried hard enough. But you also helped give yourself away. You recognized my car and broke into a run. Very few people would have recognized my private car, Sam. But of course you knew it well."

"So that's what the rainy-day bandit did on sunny days," Fletcher said as they nudged Sam into the car for the trip downtown. "The car wash was closed when it rained, but you always had to be here working when the weather was good."

Leopold tossed his coat into the back seat. "I'm soaked to the skin, and I still didn't get my car washed. Robbery detail is too wet a business, Tommy. From now on I stick to homicides."

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Mrs. Twiller was really a dear old lady, as soft-hearted and benevolent as a certain "gentleman" was hard-hearted and malevolent; and who would have believed what Mrs. Twiller found under the Hardware Department? . . .

MRS. TWILLER TAKES A TRIP

by LAEL J. LITTKE

OLD MRS. TWILLER RAN A gnarled finger over the inexpensive wrist watches on the display card and smiled tremulously at the salesgirl.

"Could I try that one on, Miss?" she said, her voice quavering a little. "The one with the pretty brown band?"

"Why, certainly," the salesgirl said, smiling back at Mrs. Twiller. "These are very nice watches for the price." She strapped the watch on Mrs. Twiller's frail wrist.

"Now, isn't that pretty?" Mrs. Twiller said, stretching out her arm and twisting it around to admire the watch from all angles. She cleared her throat. "How much is it, my dear?" she asked hesitantly.

The salesgirl beamed. "Would you believe it? They're only $9.98. A special, this week only. Shall I wrap that one up for you?"

"Oh, mercy, no," Mrs. Twiller said. "$9.98? Oh, mercy." She fumbled at the buckle on the wristband, trying to undo it.

The salesgirl looked perplexed. "It's very reasonable," she said. "Really, it's a bargain for the price."

Mrs. Twiller looked up brightly. "Oh, it's just lovely," she assured the girl, "but with everything so dear these days—oh, my, I couldn't possibly spend all that on a watch. Thank you anyway, Miss."

The girl blinked a little as she helped undo the watch. "I'm awfully sorry, ma'am."

"That's all right, dearie." Mrs. Twiller patted the girl's hand. "It's just that a body can't help wishing now and then." She held the watch in her fragile hand and gazed at it with one last sympathetic look as the girl turned to another customer.

With a quick motion Mrs. Twiller dropped the watch into the large shopping bag at her feet.

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There, she thought. With the transistor radio and the electric shaver she already had in the bag, that should be enough for one day. The money Mr. Simpson would give her for them would feed her army of stray cats for several days.

As she stooped over to pick up her bag, Mrs. Twiller noticed a man watching her from two counters away. A floorwalker, no doubt. She grasped the handles of the bag and straightened up, tottering just a little not so much as to make the floorwalker come to her assistance, but just enough to make him think tenderly of his own dear old mother. She fluttered a hand to her chest and saw the suspicious look on his face fade away and be replaced by a benign smile.

Well, that took care of him. Now if he saw her drop something into her bag he would merely chalk it up to her absent-mindedness, which was certainly forgivable in a lady of her age.

It was time to leave, but first Mrs. Twiller wanted to visit the basement floor and pick up a few more plastic bowls for the new cats who just that week had found out about the private welfare center she ran. They did so appreciate their own dishes and she liked to afford them that small dignity.

On the way down the escalator she checked her coin purse to see that she had the necessary cash. She wouldn't think of filching anything like the dishes. That wouldn't be ethical. She only took the other things because she just couldn't stretch the tiny check she received weekly from her son—certainly could not stretch it to cover all the cat food she put out each day. Besides, her son kept close account of how she spent the allowance he sent her.

Actually, she thought, the department store would probably be quite proud of the humane project they were supporting, if only they knew.

Suddenly Mrs. Twiller realized she had been on the escalator for some time. She should be down to the basement floor by now. Maybe the escalator was broken. No, it was still moving. Then why was it taking so long?

Mrs. Twiller squinted into the darkness. Darkness? Why was it dark? Was there another power failure like the one in 1965? No, the escalator would have stopped if that were the case.

For a moment Mrs. Twiller was alarmed, then she breathed a sigh of relief when she saw a glimmer of light far down in the mists at the bottom of the escalator. Mists? Mists in a department-store basement?

The light became brighter as she descended toward it. The mists began to look more like smoke and she could detect a faint

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sulfuric smell. In the distance she could see what looked like vast fires. And then she caught sight of a colossal gate, topped by a spectacular sign whose flaming letters spelled out: HELL. Underneath was a smaller sign which read: Entrance.

"My stars," marveled Mrs. Twiller aloud. "So that's where it is, right here under the Hardware Department."

She didn't have much time to wonder about it because she was about to be met by an uncomfortable-looking individual who appeared to have a bad sunburn.

"Follow me, lady," he intoned without introducing himself, which Mrs. Twiller regarded as especially bad manners. But then, she reasoned, what else could you expect in Hell?

She decided she had better follow the man since it seemed safer than trying to escape into the smoky terrain that stretched out on all sides. He led her into a seared building beside the imposing gate, and Mrs. Twiller found herself in a large room decorated sumptuously in vivid colors—scarlet, tangerine, and blood-red, among others. There was another fiery-looking individual seated behind a huge table which Mrs. Twiller took to be a reception desk, but when she headed toward it her guide said curtly, "Sit down," and disappeared through a crimson door.

Mrs. Twiller chose a cherry-colored sofa and sat down heavily, jarring her poor old bones until they rattled. Despite its soft appearance, the sofa was hard as a rock—which was only logical, Mrs. Twiller thought, since on closer examination it turned out to be made of petrified lava. She settled herself as comfortably as she could and glanced at the man behind the desk; but he was occupied with some business of his own involving a large book into which he seemed to be burning notations. Since he seemed in no way hostile, she relaxed a little and let her gaze roam around the brilliant room.

Mercy, she thought, it was a nice place to see but she certainly wouldn't want to live here. Not that it wasn't beautiful, in its own fashion, with its startling colors and stunning art objects scattered casually about. But to Mrs. Twiller's way of thinking it was overdone and even rather vulgar, as if the owner were trying to impress someone by displaying the valuable things he owned. Still, she caught her breath as she leaned closer to examine a small gold figurine of an imp which reposed on an obsidian table next to the sofa. There was also a ruby statue of indeterminate shape and a small vase studded with huge diamonds. She was admiring a solid platinum Mt. Vesuvius when a deep voice addressed her.

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"Mrs. Twiller."

She turned quickly to see an elegant dark-haired gentleman attired in a shiny-black cutaway coat with a copper-red vest and tie, and striped trousers. He wore a well-trimmed goatee and managed to look distinguished in spite of being a brilliant shade of red.

Mrs. Twiller gulped, then stiffened her back. "How do you know my name?" she asked, standing up and eyeing him belligerently.

"I make it my business to know the names of people like you," he said, smiling sardonically.

Mrs. Twiller clutched her shopping bag in both arms, it being the only familiar object in this frightening situation. "What do you mean, people like me?" she demanded somewhat weakly.

The fiery-faced gentleman shrugged. "I hate to apply so harsh a term as thief to so lovely a lady. Shall we say pilferer?"

"I don't know what you mean," Mrs. Twiller whispered, her voice trembling. She let her left hand flutter to her throat in the gesture that never failed to make strong men turn squishy with concern and sentiment.

The red individual raised his hand. "Please, dear lady," he said, "spare me that. I am well aware of your wiles and I also have a record of every item you have ever appropriated for your — ahem — worthy cause."

Mention of her project gave Mrs. Twiller new courage. "Who would feed all those starving cats if I didn't? I'm just trying to do a little good in the world the only way I know how." She blinked her eyes and tried her best to squeeze out a tear or two.

The man in the cutaway, which had turned wine-red, strode to a window whose black shade he raised to reveal a landscape of fire and smoke. "Dear lady," he said, "you seem to forget where you are. We are not concerned with the good you do. Quite the contrary!" He turned and pointed a slender finger at her. "You are running up a very bad record, Mrs. Twiller, and I have brought you down here this time just for a warning. Mend your ways or you may end up down here for good — or rather, I should say, for bad."

"This time?" Mrs. Twiller was cheered. "You mean I'm not really here to stay?"

Her companion gave a short laugh and turned back to gaze out of the window at his domain. "I hope to frighten you enough so that we can burn our records on you, Mrs. Twiller. What would happen if we started taking in little old ladies like you down here? In a short time we'd have frilly curtains at our windows and sweet daffodils all around our fire pits." He swung around. "This

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is a last warning, dear lady. No more stealing from department stores or you'll wind up down here, and none of us would like that, now, would we?"

Mrs. Twiller's courage had returned. "Oh, I don't know," she said, running her hand over an emerald statuette of the god Pan. "It doesn't seem to be that bad down here."

"You've noticed my collection," the scarlet man said, a note of pride creeping into his voice. "Of course there are compensations to this job or no one would want it, not even me. I can truthfully say that I own the most priceless objets d'art in existence." He stopped and sighed. "The hell of it is, there's really no challenge to getting them. All I have to do is wish for them and they're mine."

"Oh, that is too bad," Mrs. Twiller clucked sympathetically. "Takes all the fun out of it if you can't outsmart someone."

"Yes, it does," grumbled the fiery one.

Mrs. Twiller made a small cooing sound and patted his arm, which made him jerk it angrily away.

"Now cut that out!" he bellowed. "See what I mean? Get a sweet little old lady down here and within ten minutes she has me all soft and mushy. I won't have it, do you hear?"

"Oh, mercy, yes," Mrs. Twiller said, retreating a couple of steps. "I hear."

The man's eyes glowed crimson. "Swear, then, that you won't take any more merchandise from any store up there."

Mrs. Twiller swallowed. "I swear. Oh, my, yes."

"Then go," roared the Master of Hades. "And see that you don't have reason to come back."

Mrs. Twiller went, clutching her shopping bag and scuttling along toward the escalator as fast as she could. She had a moment of panic when she discovered that the escaltor moved only down, but she did find a narrow, almost unused stairway which she ascended as quickly as she could; and she didn't stop until she reached the department-store's street floor.

"Missed the basement again," she puffed, but decided against going back down. She was already late for her weekly appointment with Mr. Simpson. She could pick up the cat dishes somewhere else, although she did like to give this store her business.

As she hurried toward the door, a display of silver flatware caught her eye. It was always easy to slip a few pieces of flatware into her shopping bag. But after a moment's hesitation she walked on past. After all, a promise was a promise. She would miss these shopping trips, though. There was something decidedly heady about

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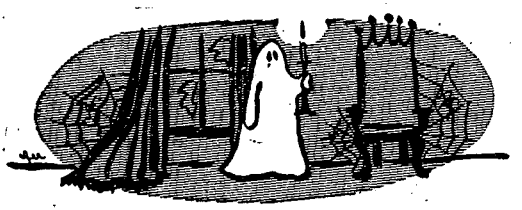
seeing what she could get away with. But of course there would really be no need for any more forays. Oh, mercy, no not with what she had in her shopping bag.

Just before entering the revolving door, Mrs. Twiller paused long enough to peep into her bag at the platinum Mt. Vesuvius, the ruby statue, the diamond-studded vase, and the emerald Pan. If she was any judge of value, her cats would be well taken care of for the rest of their combined nine lives.

Humming softly and a little breathlessly to herself, she closed her bag and hurried from the store. Mrs. Twiller had had a good trip.



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complete in this issue

Readers familiar with the work of Holly Roth know that she was a very fine writer who could, simultaneously, be almost coldly objective and highly charged with emotion—no small achievement either in style or in subject matter. In "The Girl Who Saw Too Much" Holly Roth gave us a short novel about a young and beautiful widow who was eyewitness to a murder, about two detectives of entirely different natures, about a handsome reporter, and about a killer who looked like "the average man." This is the story of a normal life in which at one moment life is routine, even dull, and at another moment, only three minutes later, life has become melodrama. This is the damsel-in-distress story written as damsel-in-distress stories should be written. An exciting short novel complete in this issue. . .

THE GIRL WHO SAW TOO MUCH

by HOLLY ROTH

ALTHOUGH THE POLICE STATION was a dank and cheerless contrast to the pleasant sunny street, Dell had been, at first, relieved to arrive there; just as she had been relieved when the policeman had finally shouldered his way through the mob at the scene of the murder she had witnessed. But the authority represented by the officer's navy-blue suit and silver shield had not been backed up by the efficiency she had dimly expected.

They had stood interminably at bay before the crowd, she and the policeman. He had intermittently grated out the old clichés,

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"Break it up" and "move along, now," but the crowd had merely milled and eddied, flowing back a step, and then forward. The police car had been long in getting there, and when it did, there had been conferences and d e l a y s. Altogether, she must have leaned against the cold stone pillar in front of the apartment house for fifteen or more minutes before being ushered, not too gently, into a sedan and driven to the station house.

And now the relief she had at first found on arriving in the police station was gone. It was almost one o'clock by the institutional-looking clock high on the wall over the raised desk. She had given her name and address, marital status, business address, and such standard data a number of times to a number of men, but for the past quarter of an hour she had sat, alone, ignored on a hard, uncomfortable bench in a corner of the big room.

She was fumbling toward a decision to take matters into her own hands, to do something, anything, to break the long pause, when one of the uniformed men strode over to her and said, "This way," and grasped her upper arm. She was tired of being grabbed firmly by the arm, but before she had made up her mind to protest he had led her a few feet to her right, through a door, and into a very small room.

The room contained a desk and two chairs, and the single window opposite the door was barred. A man in a brown suit sat in the chair behind the desk.

The uniformed p o l i c e m a n guided her to the chair facing the man, and then left, closing the door behind him. There was silence while the man behind the desk filled in blanks on a form.

He was a thick man, heavy-looking, but, she estimated, not tall. He was hunched over the desk in such a way that all he presented to her was a foreshortened oval of sparse iron-gray hair.

He spoke his first w o r d s without looking up. His voice was harsh. "Your name?"

"Dell Kenlon."

"Your *real* name." He peered up from under heavy eyebrows and disclosed a thick-featured, impassive face, with small, intelligent-looking, disagreeable eyes.

"That's my real name."

"All right, then, put it this way: give me your full name."

Dell said, "My full name is Dell Harrington Kenlon."

He looked at her expressionlessly for a minute and then said, "What does 'Dell' stand for?"

"I was christened Dell, just Dell," she said evenly.

"We'll pass it for the moment. Your age?"

"I've answered these questions outside—"

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"Answer them again." There was a quality in his voice that Dell couldn't put her finger on, an out-of-place quality. "Your age?"

"Twenty-six."

"Married or single?"

"Widow." She knew what was wrong now: although abrupt, coldly impersonal on the surface, his interest was actually personal, avid.

"What were you doing five blocks away from the address you gave the officer at the desk as your home address?"

"What was I—?" The question was ridiculous, but she found it difficult to phrase her resentment. She said, "Is there some law forbidding me to leave my house?" But he didn't look up, and she found herself answering his question as if there were just such a law. "I was going to visit my mother."

"Do you work?"

"Yes".

"Well? Well?" He tapped the pencil on the desk and looked up impatiently from under the iron-gray eyebrows. The fact that he hadn't sat up or raised his chin was insulting, as if he hadn't considered her worth that much attention.

She sat up straighter and spoke distinctly. "I am a model at Geller and Reiss, on Seventh Avenue."

"A model," he repeated, and smiled for the first time. She wished he hadn't. "So you're a model and you live alone. What do you model?"

Indignation brought Dell's numbed senses alive. In a rush she became again all the things she had been before eleven thirty-five that morning. The door behind her opened, but she paid no attention to it. Her knees suddenly regained full muscular control, her mind was clear, her emotions were concentrated in the one overwhelming sensation of anger.

She got up out of her chair and spoke slowly and clearly. "I model dresses—high-necked dresses. And it's none of your business. I am a citizen—" The words echoed in her ears with a tired old ring, and she added, "I know that's a hackneyed phrase, but it's true, just the same. I'm supposed to be protected, not insulted. It's up to me to ask questions, not you. What happened? Who was the man who was killed? Why are you holding me here? Where is there a telephone? I've had a nasty experience, and I am going home and lie down. And"—it hit her with sudden force—"why haven't you asked me the important questions: what I saw, if I saw the man who did it, if I could identify—"

A voice behind her said, "All right, Orcutt."

She half turned. A big man in a tweed suit was standing in the doorway behind her, holding the door open with a clear invitation.

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He repeated, "All right, Orcutt. That's enough."

The man at the desk said dispassionately, "Get out of here, Keeley."

Keeley said, "The captain sent me, George. *You* get out." His voice was very cold.

The two men stared at each other for a full deadlocked minute. Then Orcutt rose and moved around the desk. He chose to go around the side on which Dell was standing and so had to brush past her to reach the door. It was a deliberate gesture, almost a shove. Then he was out the door and it had closed behind him.

Dell measured the big man frigidly. Then she said, "I'm leaving here. Please get out of my way."

"Mrs. Kenlon, I'm sorry."

"I don't care how sorry you are, I've had enough. I'm—"

"Will you listen to me for just one minute?"

His voice was good—clear, even, intelligent. His face was good, too. His eyes were slightly squinted, and the resultant wrinkles were disarming. His mouth was big, full-lipped but firm, his nose was straight and rather small, which gave him a boyish look.

As she hesitated he went on, "We owe you an apology. You shouldn't have been kept waiting, but it took a little time to identify the dead man, and we always have a vast amount of red tape to go through. If you'll just tell me what happened, as briefly as you like, I'll tell you what we've discovered so far."

They were the first intelligent words she had heard in almost two hours. She said, "All right," and then, still standing, with one hand on the chair's back, she told the man about her morning.

She told it in brief, competent statements of fact, but as she spoke something of the emotional impact of the experience came through. One moment life had been routine, a little dull; the next three minutes had transformed it into melodrama. And when the whole world changes and the guide marks are gone, can one be sure that underneath things are as they were before?

It had been like every other Sunday morning in Manhattan in the spring, but Dell Kenlon wasn't used to being out at that hour, eleven thirty, and it was a novel experience to see a New York street, even a semiresidential street, so quiet, so deserted. The city, she realized, had split into two groups: the churchgoers and the loungers. Those who weren't in church were still in pajamas. She normally belonged to the lazy group, but the lovely day had beckoned her out into the fresh warm air. Now she was almost at her mother's door and she was too early, since her mother was a

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churchgoer; but Dell had a key and had decided to surprise her mother by having a second breakfast ready for her when she returned.

As Dell rounded the corner and came abreast of the first of two enormous, dirty stone pillars, that stood sentinel at the entrance to her mother's apartment house, there was a sharp, rather loud sound. Something swished behind her left ear, and then, seeming to move in the opposite direction, streaked past her nose. Her head was jerked by her surprise to the left, and there, on the edge of the pillar beside her, was a fresh white gash in the dirty gray.

Momentum carried her one step forward past the stone shaft and gave her the view, up thirty feet of driveway, to the massive iron doors of the building. Very near her, coming toward her, was a man, a shortish man, who had apparently just left the house. There was nothing unusual about him except that at that moment he sank to his knees, seemed to stare at her, and then fell forward at her feet. Mixed in with his falling were three more of the loud sounds.

Dell took a step backward, away from the man, and turned slowly around. There, across the street, standing in the doorway of a radio repair shop—closed, of course, on Sunday—was the man she had suddenly known would be there. In his right hand was the gun, smoke still curling gently from it. He put it into his pocket as she watched.

She had only a glimpse of his face, half in shadow under the brim of his low-pulled hat, but she could tell he was looking directly at her. They stood there, hypnotized for a moment, and then came the sound of running feet. Dell closed her eyes, weak with relief at the approach of help. When she opened them again the man had disappeared, swallowed by the gathering crowd.

People, alerted by the sound of shots, were pouring from the houses, pounding along the street toward Dell, surrounding her. She stood immobile, bracing herself against the shock of too many faces too close: curious eyes, opened mouths, a mass facial expression she had never seen before, a naked look with herself as its target. She tried to disentangle the faces, but they seemed all strangers.

She was alone before the crowd. Its members had an odd trick of ignoring her, while staring at her; asking one another questions as if she weren't there. Her sense of confusion deepened.

When, finally, she saw the blue-visored cap with its silver shield glinting in the sun she was grateful. And when the officer's hand closed on her arm Dell was glad he had come. . .

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The big man in the tweed suit had listened with sympathy. When she finished, "And then they brought me here and I sat and sat—" he distracted her from her growing sense of panic by interrupting. "Well," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, "that's all very clear. Now, to answer your questions: the first shot ricocheted off the stone pillar. That was the swishing sound you heard. The bullet traced a triangle, with you inside its acute end. The next three shots all hit the man for whom they were intended. Now, you saw the man who did the shooting?"

Dell let her mind go back to the sunny street. She described what she had seen, and the impressions she had formed.

"All right," the detective said. "He was nice-looking, comparatively young. Thirty, would you say?"

She hesitated. "About that."

"Yes. Gray suit, gray topcoat, gray hat with black band. About six feet."

"As near as I could tell."

"But you couldn't see his eyes, you didn't notice the color of his tie, and you don't know what kind of a gun it was."

"Mr. —" She paused.

"Keeley. Lieutenant Keeley."

"Lieutenant Keeley, I never saw a gun before. Never. How could I—?" She stopped because he was smiling. It was a smile with real amusement in it and, without understanding its cause, she found herself smiling with him.

He said, "We deal with so many people who are very, very familiar with guns that it becomes difficult to realize that the majority of New Yorkers have never seen one close up . . . Would you recognize him, Mrs. Kenlon?"

Dell hesitated. "That's hard to answer," she said finally. "I have a clear impression of him standing there, with a gun in his hand. But if he was simply to pass me on the street I'm not so sure. He looked so—so average somehow."

"Well, that makes sense."

He moved away from the door, around the desk. "Sit down for a minute," he suggested. He waited until she was seated before he sat down behind the desk.

"Let me explain something to you." He sat squarely in the chair, staring down at his large competent-looking hands. When he looked up his face was very earnest.

"We think we know who fired those shots, because of the history of the dead man. Your description of the gunman tends to confirm our opinion. If we can put our hands on him you will probably be able to identify him. But if you are *not* able to identify him we can be as sure of ourselves as we wish and we still won't be able to make it stick. If he can't prove

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where he was at eleven thirty-five—so what? A jury would decide, and rightly, that thousands of people can't prove where they were at exactly eleven thirty-five Sunday morning. So you see—" He seemed to run out of words.

Dell wasn't sure she did see. He obviously wanted something from her, but what? Stories she had read and seen enacted, stories that dealt with frightened witnesses, ran through her mind.

"If I can identify him," she said earnestly, "I will. I wouldn't be afraid to, if that's what you mean."

"Well, that isn't exactly what I mean. You see, he saw you, too. He's probably not a stupid man. I don't think he'll miss the obvious fact that you are a—a threat."

She felt the terrible unreality coming back over her. "Do you mean that he'll try to—?"

He spoke quickly and reassuringly. "Well, that's what I mean, but it's a very unlikely event. First of all, it would be dangerous for him to try it, of course. Simpler just to get out of town. And, anyway, he doesn't know where to find you. You say no one in the crowd knew you. That's a piece of luck. You just stay away from your mother's house and you should be in no danger. To be on the safe side, don't mention your involvement to your mother or anyone else. That'll take restraint." He measured her with his eyes and added, "But I think you can do it.

"I really don't think you're in danger," he repeated. "I just felt it would be fairer if you were aware of all the facets of the situation. Now" —he stood up—"you go home and get that rest you were telling Orcutt about when I came in." He smiled in sympathetic memory of her tirade.

She got up and preceded him to the door. There she turned and asked, "But who was the murdered man?"

"His name was Sedgley Mathias. He was once a police detective."

"Oh. And who do you think killed him?"

He hesitated. Then he said, "Well, we think it was a man named Orcutt, William Orcutt."

She said, "Oh," again, but as he reached for the doorknob she drew back, blocking his way. She motioned at the desk. She said, "But that man—"

"Yes," he said. "William Orcutt is Lieutenant Orcutt's brother."

When they had crossed the general room and reached the door he touched her arm, stopping her. "Down the hall," he said, "the room on the right will have some reporters in it. I'll handle them; you had better say nothing. Don't be nervous. There won't be a mob, just a few men."

As they moved down the hall

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Keeley started past the open door on the right, but he didn't make it. A man called out, "Hey, Lieutenant! That the witness?"

There were three men in the room. One was elderly and sloppy; one was middle-aged and prissy-looking; the third came nearest the traditional movie reporter, except that in addition to being young and good-looking he was extremely well dressed.

Keeley turned slowly around and stood in the doorway. His bulk almost filled the opening, and very little of Dell was visible to the three men inside. Keeley said to the prissy-looking man. "Yeah, Dunn. This is the young lady."

"What's her name, Lieutenant? Come on in."

Keeley said, "No." Dell couldn't see his face, but his voice, crisp and professional, sounded very different.

"Look," he said, "I'm not one for baloney. And I've never handed you any dramatics. I'm not going to pull any now. I'll leave it to your common sense. She's the only one who can identify the guy. Her name and address in the papers would tip him off. It's standard knowledge that the penalty for two is no greater than the chair for one. Get it?"

There was a pause. Then Keeley added, "Now I know no one is going to try to get any silly beats on this. It would cost you your jobs, in fact, since no editor wants blood news. But in case you talk in your sleep I think it's just as well you don't know her name or address." He moved aside so that they could see Dell. "It's too bad, though, that your readers will have no way of knowing that just for once the 'young, beautiful, mysterious witness being shielded by the police' is on-the-level young and beautiful." He looked down at Dell expressionlessly.

The prissy man said, "She sure is. Okay. Wish you luck, honey." The old man looked bored. The young man looked very much interested.

Keeley piloted Dell away.

Outside, on the stone landing at the top of the four steps leading to the sidewalk, Keeley stood still and looked uncertain.

She said, "Thank you, Lieutenant. I may go home now?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kenlon. I—I'd like to take you, but I'm—"

She was surprised. She hadn't expected the offer, even the negative offer, and he looked flustered. He had been very self-contained up to that moment. She thought again that he had a nice face.

She said, "Thanks just the same, but I'll be fine. I'll take a cab."

"There's a cab stand at the corner, half a block down."

She started toward the steps,

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then stopped. "You'll be in touch with me?"

"Certainly. I'll call you. That is, we—" He stopped.

She said, with amusement, "Thank you, Lieutenant."

The street was still sunny and warm, and the world was probably the same as it had always been. She walked quickly toward the corner. She would go home, call her mother, eat lunch, and take a nap. Then she would try to see her morning in proper perspective. Perhaps if she stood back from it, it could even be made to seem exciting.

She stopped dead. A man with a shock of blond hair that looked like a wig had leaped out of a car a few feet ahead of her and, in a lightning gesture, had planted himself directly in her path. He was aiming something, aiming—

There was a click, and Dell, fighting against the first threatened faint of her life, reached wildly for something to hold on to. Surprisingly, there was a hand beside her and an arm supporting her shoulders. She rested against the arm and fought the blackness.

A voice over her shoulder said, with restrained fury, "Peters, can't you ever get a camera shot without scaring a person to death? What are you playing—junior G-man? Anyway, we can't use pictures."

The arm turned Dell gently around. "Are you all right, miss?"

Dell looked up into the worried eyes of the good-looking young man who had been in the reporters' room. She struggled to say she was all right, but shock on shock had been too much. She didn't seem able to open her mouth.

"Peters, open the back door . . . Here, sit down in here. Get your breath."

He guided her into the car and she rested her head against the back of the seat while he, rather pointlessly, she thought, rubbed her hands between his. His face was full of concern.

After a minute she said, "I'm really all right. It was just that on top of the other—"

"Sure, I know." He looked relieved. "We'll take you home."

"I can get a cab—"

He waved an airy hand. "Not a chance. Come on, Pete. You drive."

The cameraman pulled his shock of hair out of the back window and got into the front seat. He shot Dell a penitent glance, but all he said was, "Where to?"

She gave him her address and then relaxed against the back of the seat. There was silence while they pulled away from the curb and then Dell said, "I'm really sorry to have caused such a fuss. I—"

"All Pete's fault. You must have had quite a morning."

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"It has been quite upsetting. You're one of the reporters, aren't you?" To his nod she added, "Is it hard on you not to get the details of the story?"

He laughed. "Well, a little, but I'll survive. No one is going to hold me responsible, anyway, because I usually do features. Sunday-supplement kind of stuff, you know."

The cameraman spoke up, impelled, Dell decided from his tone of voice, by simple hero worship. "I don't know what it's all about, lady, but no pix, and now you say no story. It must be killing him. He's got a rep for showing up the cops. If he can't say nothing, Jim'll die."

The reporter laughed again. "I'll try to hang on," he said. "But thanks for the buildup."

At her door he handed her gently out of the car and then, standing on the curb beside the open door, asked, "You'll be all right?"

"Fine, now. And thanks for the ride."

"Least we could do. I'll call later, if I may, to find out if you're really okay." The "if I may," she decided, was mere terminology.

He turned toward the car door and then back to her. "My name is Barlow. Jim Barlow. And yours?"

"Dell Kenlon." She paused and then added slowly, "You weren't supposed to know that."

"Oh"—the hand wave came into play—"you heard Keeley. I wouldn't dream of using it. But I wouldn't be able to get you on the phone unless I knew your name, would I, Miss Kenlon?" He smiled, showing white teeth.

And Dell suddenly felt that he was more than good-looking; he was startlingly handsome. She said, "Mrs. Kenlon."

His pause wasn't an instant long. He said smoothly, "Well, then, Mr. Kenlon will be taking care of you, won't he?"

She said slowly, "No. No, he won't." She turned and walked up the steps of her little converted apartment house, leaving him on the sidewalk, hat in hand, looking gratified.

At eleven that night, even though she had had a two-hour nap in the late afternoon, Dell was more than ready to go to bed. She was feeling better, almost normal, but very tired. As she went through the routine of getting to bed she found herself thinking of the two men, Barlow and Keeley, as a study in contrasts. The reporter, s l e n d e r smooth, handsome, and v e r y engaging. The lieutenant, square, solid, shy—and very engaging.

She went from room to room closing the windows. Most of them were actually doors, great plate-glass panes set in wrought iron, extending from the floor

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almost to the lofty ceilings, and opening onto miniature balconies.

She loved the apartment—its big rooms, its high ceilings, and its beautiful floors. It was, of course, too big for a woman alone, but she and Max had lived in it and loved it, and she had long before given up the struggle with her conscience, which told her the apartment was a ridiculous extravagance.

She went into the kitchen and, leaning against the long natural-wood cabinet Max had built in, drank a glass of milk. Then she took the paper bag out of the garbage container and went to her service entrance.

Laced onto the rear of the house was what, in mundane terms, could be called a fire escape, but for beauty and convenience it outdid any fire escape ever built. Made of the most delicate and graceful wrought iron, it was sturdy and wide, and it looked like a part of the old house, not a last-minute appendage. It was used for deliveries and pickups: laundry, milk, garbage. On summer evenings she and Max had sat on its spacious platform, and looked down into the beautiful, overgrown garden that ran the length of the block between the streets—one of the many hidden Manhattan gardens that out-of-towners never know exist. In this case, the street's tenants had been wise enough not to partition the garden into little rectangles.

She put the garbage in its outdoor receptacle, disguised by Max to look like a tool box, and then stood looking dreamily down at the dim garden four stories below. Something white at her feet caught her attention. She realized it was the Sunday paper, delivered that morning and ignored in the confusion of the day. She bent to pick it up. There was a report, and then, beside her, the now familiar sound of a bullet biting into stone.

Dell lay on her stomach. The iron was cold.

"I wonder if I was in the apex of *that* triangle?" she thought, almost dreamily. The next one . . .

The realization that there might be another bullet brought a sudden, urgent clarity to her thoughts. There was no way back into the apartment except through the kitchen door. The only light on in the kitchen was the concealed tube under the hanging cabinets, but that was enough to make a pale outline of the open doorway.

Nevertheless, there was no other way in. She had to get through the doorway.

Dell moved as she had seen soldiers do in the movies, dragging her body along by the elbows. It was even more difficult than it looked. Beneath the sill of the doorway she rested, and then decided it would be less risky to

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make an upright dash through the opening than to try to slither over the doorsill. She gathered strength and breath, rose, and burst through the opening. She closed the door in a split second, but nevertheless a second bullet hit it before it was completely closed. She had always resented the weight of the heavy iron door; she would never resent it again.

She put out the light in the kitchen, snapped off the lamp in the hall, and crawled into her bedroom, where she turned off the one of the two bedside lamps that was lit. Then, safe in the darkness, she latched the only window she had left open, the bedroom window, drew the heavy draperies across it and, in the pitch-darkness, felt her way to the phone. As she reached for it, it rang loudly in the stillness, and her heart climbed into her throat from the unexpectedness of the sound. Then she picked up the receiver and said weakly, "Hello?"

"This is Jim Barlow, Mrs. Kenlon. I know it's late to call you, but I got caught up in some business, couldn't get away. You weren't asleep, were you? How are you feeling?" There was a pause, and then, in a sharper voice, the reporter said, "Mrs. Kenlon?"

Dell said, in a flat tone, "Someone just shot me."

"*Shot* you! Where are you hit? . . . Mrs. Kenlon, answer me!"

"No," she said. "No. That was wrong. Someone shot *at* me. Twice. I'm not hit. I'm just—I'm just—"

"All right. Lock yourself in. I'll be right there. Take me ten minutes, maybe less. I'll ring five times, short rings. Don't let anyone else in." The phone clicked.

Dell stared at the receiver. Then she depressed the cradle and called the police. After what seemed an interminable number of transfers she finally convinced the last man that he could not help her, that no one could help her except Lieutenant Keeley.

"Well," he said, "Lieutenant Keeley is off duty, but if it's as important as all that I guess you can call him at home." He gave her a telephone number.

The phone rang only once before Keeley said, "Yes?"

By that time she was entirely coherent.

Keeley said, "I see. I see. All right. I'll be right over." He repeated her address. "I'll press the bell three times—long deliberate rings. Don't open the door to anyone else."

He disconnected and she was alone again in the dark house. But not for long, she felt, on a note of rising hysteria. At any minute the doorbell would be sounding off in various and complicated signals . . . The absurdity

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of it overcame her panic.

She felt her way into the bathroom where, since it had no windows, she could turn on a light. She combed her hair and put on lipstick. Before she had quite finished, the doorbell pealed five times, quickly. "The reporter," she thought, "if I have my code straight."

It was Barlow, and when she saw his face in the light from the outside hallway her sense of amusement left her abruptly. Concern, honest and deep concern, was plainly written on his face. He said, "You're not hurt? You're really all right?"

She closed the door and pressed the light switch on its left. Instead of a lamp or an overhead light, the switch controlled the small tapered bulbs concealed beneath the paintings on the walls, and the hall bloomed into soft and lovely radiance.

"Yes," she said. "I really am all right. Put your hat on the table and let's sit here in the hall, so we won't be within reach of any of the windows."

But he stood still, looking at the walls. "What beautiful—oh," he said. "You must be Max Kenlon's widow."

"Yes, those are Max's."

The doorbell rang, three long rings, and she moved to open the door. Barlow came out of his picture-filled trance a second too late. He said sharply, "Don't!"

Keeley, standing in the doorway, said, "Don't what?"

"I was going to say, 'Don't open the door,' but—"

"Were you? And how did you get in here?"

"Same way you did. How do you think I got in—through the window?"

"No, I thought maybe you shot through the window."

Barlow put his hat on the table with quiet deliberation, then turned around so that he was squarely facing Keeley. He said, "Did you, now? That's an interesting idea. It's also insulting, slanderous, and worthy of action."

"Really? Well, then, why don't you try taking action? But, although we both know you think you're smarter than the police, it's still my duty to point out you're not supposed to know where Mrs. Kenlon lives. You have no right here, and you got here awfully fast."

"I'm not the only one who knows where Mrs. Kenlon lives."

"No? Who else does? Your paper's entire circulation?"

"No, Keeley, they don't," Barlow said. "*You* do."

The lieutenant took one quick step forward, and Dell put her hand on his arm. She said, "Don't you think, Lieutenant Keeley, that we ought to close the door?"

The two men looked at her as if they had forgotten her existence. She put the thought into

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words. "It seems to me that you are both missing the point. Bullets—*bullets*—" her voice shook with incredulity—"have been raining around me. And all I was doing was just putting out the garbage—" She caught her breath.

Keeley's face had lost its antagonism. He closed the door and leaned back against it. His voice was very gentle. "You're right, Mrs. Kenlon. We were missing the point. Tell me what happened."

Dell told him. It was amazing, she thought, how anything so shocking, so foreign to all her past life, could be condensed into a few brief statements of insane fact. "The shot hit the wall; there'll be a mark, I imagine . . . I lay on my stomach . . . Another bullet hit the back door . . .

"And then you both came," she finished. She put her hand to her head in an unconscious little gesture of confusion. "There was something else . . . Oh, yes. While you two were—discussing—the rather absurd possibilities, I was thinking that there's someone else who knows where I live."

Keeley said, "Who?"

"Lieutenant Orcutt."

"Oh. Well, that's a legitimate point. I think I'd better explain the situation to you. Can we sit somewhere?" He waved his hat in a rather helpless fashion.

"I thought we ought to stay here, away from the windows."

Barlow said to Keeley, "Aren't you going to take a look around outside? Or don't you care?"

Keeley's face was stony. "You think he's waiting out there for me? Aren't you going to go home? Or don't you have one?"

Dell said, "Please." Her face twisted a little.

Keeley said, "I'm sorry. Let's sit down."

The hall had been furnished, not as a place to lounge in, but as a passageway and a gallery, and so as they sat in three of the four straight chairs, they looked and felt stiff and uncomfortable. The men sat at either end of the long narrow table, and Dell sat between them.

As he settled onto his chair Keeley looked up at the walls, at each glowing frame in its individual soft light, and said, "Max Kenlon's?"

"Yes."

"Oh." He absorbed the knowledge with less surprise than Barlow had shown. "Well, about George Orcutt. I don't think he has a thing to do with Mathias' death, but I'm surprised the name hasn't clicked with you. It looks like an upsurge of the Orcutt case, you see."

Dell looked blank.

"You don't remember it? Well, it was quite a sensation about seven years ago. Perhaps it made a greater impression on me than

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on most people because I was new on the force. Then, too, I originally came from Staten Island.

"There was this family who lived on Staten Island. Name was Orcutt. That is, the main branch was named Orcutt; there were dozens of cousins and in-laws. They ruled the island in a way, but everyone thought it was an okay way. They owned lumberyards, a contracting business, and a cement business. Two of 'em held high civic offices. All very honorable.

"And then one day a Manhattan cop, a captain of police, spilled everything. No one has ever been sure why he decided to talk, and he never explained. He was Sedgley Mathias, the man who was killed today. Either he got religion, whiich seems very much out of character, or, more likely, he was cheated on a payoff and got so mad he figured it was worth it.

"Whatever his reasons, from what Mathias had to say it became very clear that the Orcutt gang was running not only Staten Island but a large part of the five boroughs. There weren't many outsiders like Sedgley Mathias in the deal; it was nearly all family. There were Williamses, Barolas, and—well, I've forgotten all the relatives' names. They were cops; they were in City Hall; they were all over the place.

"It was a big newspaper sensation, of course, because it had a kind of feudal touch. At first it was even romantic, in a sort of nasty way. But more and more stuff came out and pretty soon it wasn't just a matter of graft and corrupting of officials—it was blackmail and arson and murder."

Barlow said, "It made an impression on me, too. I had just got my first reporting job. And since then I've rehashed it in articles a number of times. Two of the men went to the chair."

Dell again had the feeling that the two men had forgotten her. They were talking *to* her, it was true, but they were bound together by an interest that she couldn't begin to share, didn't want to share. Politics, corruption, murder, people who "went to the chair"—these things could not be real to her. Even if, as Keeley seemed to be implying, she was standing in a storm of bullets as a result of these Staten Island events, her desire was only to make the storm stop, not to understand what had started it.

But she saw that to Barlow and Keeley it was a professionally intriguing puzzle, and the antagonism which had hummed between them a few minutes earlier had given way to an impersonal but mutual fascination.

Keeley said, "Yes, two men went to the chair—the patriarch, Daniel Orcutt, and his oldest son,

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Sam. Half a dozen others went to prison for varying terms. But that wasn't the end of the Orcutts. Some hereditary strain seems to be at work. We're constantly picking up men, for everything from petty larceny to murder, who turn out to have Orcutt blood."

Dell said, "Like Lieutenant Orcutt."

Keeley hesitated. "Yes, we can't get around the fact that George is an Orcutt. Daniel Orcutt had three sons: Samuel was executed; George was a young cop who had broken with his family; William was a kid who was ignored at the time, but has since created quite a ruckus."

"So you think William shot Mathias?" Barlow asked interestedly.

"We think so. He turned up in the West some time ago, behaving like a traditional bad man—holding up banks in small towns and so on. He gave his real name on three or four occasions, and there is enough surrounding evidence to be pretty certain he is really William Orcutt. He's never been caught, never been fingerprinted or photographed, but descriptions all tally with the one Mrs. Kenlon gave me this morning. On the few occasions he opened his mouth he spoke rather vaguely of 'revenge.'"

Barlow said, "It seems to me you are going off half cocked. Mathias wasn't too lily-white a character. Maybe a lot of people would be willing to promote his death."

"Mathias went to jail for five years. Since he came out he has been working as a salesman in the wholesale-grocery business. His wife had divorced him while he was in prison, and she now lives, under another name, with her two children, in the same building as Mrs. Harrington, Mrs. Kenlon's mother. Mathias had been making his usual Sunday visit to the children this morning."

Keeley paused. Then he added, "The big point is this: during the last month Headquarters has received three letters. They were identical, and very much in the old-fashioned, melodramatic pattern of a bad man. They said, 'Mathias will die. Revenge will be had.'"

There was a little silence. Then Barlow said, "All right. Maybe your guess is good, maybe it's the young Orcutt. What are you doing about it? Why aren't you outside seeing what you can find out?"

"Keeley said, "Don't be a fool! I called before I left my house. Four men met me downstairs. They're doing the routine—taking footprint casts if there are any prints, checking on the roof, and so on. Just because you've appointed yourself unofficial examiner of the police department—"

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Barlow snapped, "My articles have helped get a lot of innocent men out of jail."

"Your articles have helped get a lot of hardened criminals out of jail."

"You're changing the subject." Barlow's face was set in stubborn lines which, instead of detracting from his handsomeness, somehow made it the more noticeable. "What about the angle of the bullets? If you'd look—"

"You'd better stick to your job," Keeley said coldly, "because, as usual, you're not doing very well at mine. Didn't you hear Mrs. Kenlon? One shot hit a stone wall, one a steel door. *What* bullets? A nick in stone or a scratch on paint doesn't give us an angle."

"Well, aren't you going to look for the guy?"

"Yes, we're going to look for him!" Keeley bellowed. He stopped, took a deep breath, and said, "Meanwhile, you can explain what you are doing here."

Barlow didn't seem to hear the question. He examined a painting on the opposite wall, presenting Keeley with a view of his excellent profile.

Dell said hastily, "I can explain that." She told Keeley about her meeting with Barlow and Peters.

Instead of being appeased, Keeley looked angrier and redder. "So still another person, a news photographer named Peters, knows where Mrs. Kenlon lives."

Barlow said, "And Pete Peters is an amateur artist. Perhaps he was jealous of Max Kenlon's genius."

"What happened to the picture Peters took?"

"I told him to destroy the negative and the one print he made. You think that was ungallant of me?"

The flat of Keeley's hand hit the hall table with a crash. "Stop clowning!"

Barlow raised his voice. "Well, stop acting as if it were all my fault! I'm as anxious as you—" He stopped abruptly, as if he had heard the loudness of his voice; as if, perhaps, he had suddenly become aware that the object of his anxiety was sitting quietly by while he and Keeley shouted.

There was another little silence, and then Keeley turned to Dell. He looked embarrassed. "I apologize for this—this bickering. I—we *are* anxious. This afternoon I was really sure you would be in the clear; it's a blow to me to learn otherwise. I'll go downstairs now and see if my men have learned anything. I'll be back in the morning with a ballistics expert. We'll take a look in daylight. Meanwhile, I'll leave two men—one front, one back."

Dell was pale with exhaustion. "Will I have to stay indoors tomorrow?" she asked listlessly.

"No, but please don't go to

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work. The garment district is too thickly populated. If you'll stay out of crowds you'll be okay, because one of my men will be right behind you, wherever you go—one step behind you at all times."

Dell said slowly, "About Lieutenant Orcutt—"

"Yes, Mrs. Kenlon?" Keeley looked tired, too. Tired but dogged.

"Well, I don't really understand. You admit that these Orcutts are bad. You mention heredity, but you absolve him."

"I don't absolve him, Mrs. Kenlon; I don't even like him very much. But I just don't think, on the basis of his record, that he is implicated. He was the Orcutt maverick. Just as respectable families sometimes have a black sheep, he was the white sheep in his."

"But he was—outrageous to me!"

"I know." Keeley looked reflective. "I think it was shock. Fury at knowing what he was about to go through again. The understandable hope that it just wasn't happening. I think, before he got himself in hand, he had some sort of blind, blundering thought that he could discredit you and make it all untrue. Not nice of him, I admit, but a very human reaction." Keeley stood up. He said to Barlow, "Coming?"

Barlow rose reluctantly. "Can I get you anything?" he asked Dell.

"I'll be fine, thanks." She smiled her gratitude.

Keeley walked abruptly to the door, flung it open, and marched the few feet across the outer hall to the self-service elevator.

Barlow started slowly after him, but stopped in the open doorway and said in a low voice, "Perhaps if I call you—perhaps we can go to some quiet place for dinner tomorrow evening?"

Some of his smoothness was gone. He seemed uncertain, and he was even nicer that way, Dell thought. She looked past him at the lieutenant's back. Keeley was standing stolidly facing the elevator. "Yes," she said to Barlow. "Perhaps we can." She raised her voice. "Good night, Lieutenant Keeley," she called.

"Good night, Mrs. Kenlon." His voice was pleasant, but he didn't turn around.

At nine the next morning Dell called Mr. Geller and explained that she wouldn't be able to get to work because she had a bad cold. Geller was so nice about it that she was ashamed. Yesterday she had been forced to lie to her mother; today, to Mr. Geller.

Keeley appeared at ten o'clock with two other men. He was very formal with her. She repeated her story once more and demonstrated

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what had happened out on the fire escape. In the light of day, with the lush new-green of the garden blanketing the ground below her, the nighttime experience seemed remote, almost impossible. But the nicks were there: white on gray stone; orange on black iron.

The men spent considerable time talking about "angles of this" and "angles of that" but she had the feeling that they were getting nowhere, and knew it.

Then Keeley joined her in the sun-flooded living room. He didn't sit down but wandered around the room, looking carefully at the paintings on the walls.

To Dell his presence carried a kind of significance she refused to think through. It seemed odd for him to be in the room, she thought, and tried to leave the thought there. But it wouldn't be left. Perhaps, she decided, her vague feeling of unrest grew out of the fact that he didn't *look* odd. His open, boyish face was nothing like Max's wonderful dark homeliness which had been a part of his compelling personality. But Keeley's bigness, the set of his shoulders as he stood examining a magnificent crowd scene, were reminiscent of Max.

In an effort to forget that resemblance she asked a question she immediately felt was awkward. "Do you like his work?"

Keeley turned to face her, surprise clearly written on his pleasant face. "Of course. Did he have a single adverse critic?" He was obviously sincere.

She laughed. "A few." She sobered. "But even they thought that in time . . ." Her voice trailed off.

He completed the thought. "And he didn't get the time."

"No."

He moved on to another picture and, with his back to her, said, "They say war is no respecter of persons, but it *should be.* Hands of such genius should not be asked to hold a rifle . . . These pictures are magnificent, breath-taking. Even if, like me, you don't know anything about it. You just don't have to know anything about art to appreciate the color, for instance."

There was a moment of silence, and then he said over his shoulder, "These are originals, of course? I don't remember ever having seen even a print of that one of the crowd."

"They're the originals. In the bedroom I have reproductions of some that hang in museums and in private collections."

"I see. Then these"—he waved his arm to indicate the four walls—"and the ones in the hall must represent a lot of money?"

She said stiffly, "Why, yes, I suppose so." She was disappointed.

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He looked abstracted. "But if you hold on to them I suppose their value is bound to go up."

"Most likely. But I don't intend to sell them. Ever."

"But you've had offers?" He looked down at her, and all of a sudden his abstraction fled and in its place came the slow reddening. He said, "I'm sorry. I didn't realize I was being rude."

She felt indefinably b e t t e r. "That's all right. I presume it's a natural question. But I have no intention of selling them. With what Max left me, and my salary, I'm quite all right. And I want these with me."

"But you've undoubtedly had offers. Any particularly persistent would-be buyers?"

She stared at him. "Why, yes. A few."

"I see. All recognized dealers or collectors?"

"I think so. Why?"

"Well—" He seemed at a loss for words, as if he weren't sure himself of the answer. "I'm looking—fumbling, I guess—for a connection. Money is always a motive, and these pictures represent a lot of money."

"Connection? With what?"

"'M a t h i a s' apartment—his own, not his wife's—is a very plush affair. He has a few Kenlon prints, and one small original. I've been checking up. He must have paid around a thousand dollars for that oil."

Dell felt the confusion coming over her again. Since the lieutenant had entered the apartment she had felt safe; he was *supposed* to make her safe, she thought. She felt an unreasonable resentment at his presenting this new theory, which upset everything.

She said abruptly, "W a i t. Wait." She sat down on the couch and spoke more quietly. "But Orc u t t—W i l l i a m Orcutt. I thought—"

"Yes." Keeley sat in a chair facing her, leaned forward, and started slowly twirling his hat between his knees. "Yes. I gave you that idea, I know. But the whole business is beginning to look wrong. Cloudy, confused."

"But *you* can't be confused!" Dell protested.

He looked up quickly, and his eyes caught and held hers. "You mean I'm the doctor and I've got to be able to—to supply a correct diagnosis?"

She didn't say anything.

"It's flattering of you, Mrs. Kenlon. But doctors don't always hit it on the first try. It doesn't mean I won't take care of you. It's just that the sooner I get it straight, the safer you'll be."

"It's not only being safe." She didn't know how to explain. She tried. "I'm the 'eyewitness,' I'm the 'innocent bystander,' t h e mysterious woman being protected by the police. These are fantastic things—things you read about

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others, but never *are* yourself. I've tried to accept that, but now you're suggesting something else—that there's a connection of some kind between me and these people who—who hold up banks, and are crooked policemen and—"

She paused, then said agitatedly, "But it's a ridiculous suggestion! I was just going to my mother's. I was just—"

"I know." As on the previous day he interrupted her, to save her from panic. But then he dropped his eyes again and stared down at the hat, as he moved it slowly around between his hands. He said, "But I'd be a bad doctor if I didn't recognize and take into consideration all the symptoms. I thought it was Orcutt. It's still possible. But the coincidence of Mathias' pictures made me wonder . . ." He stopped. "Well," he said, "we'll see."

He asked a few more questions about the shooting on the fire escape, then left rather abruptly. She felt thoroughly confused and almost overwhelmed by a sense of foreboding . . .

By five o'clock, when Barlow called, she was feeling like a caged mouse. She had begun to realize that her listlessness was at least partially the result of lack of air and exercise. Policemen might be stationed in front and back of the house, but Dell found herself unable to open her windows or even to draw the draperies apart.

Barlow's pleasant voice came over the telephone like a deliverance. She assured him she would be delighted to have dinner with him and agreed that six thirty would be fine. Later, when she opened the door to him, his handsome face was nice to see, like that of an old friend.

She had never been in the restaurant before. It was called The Jade Garden, and jade the room was, an even tone of deep, restful, soft green—rugs, ceiling, walls, shrubbery. The white tablecloths shone invitingly against the soothing background. The headwaiter found them a table in a far corner of the room.

Dell settled into her chair and listened to Barlow. He was gay and amusing, and with his every word she felt herself relaxing more and more. When the waiter came up and stood with pencil poised, Barlow suggested steak, and Dell agreed. As the waiter went off, Barlow put his arms on the table and leaned toward her, smiling.

"Were you in the dumps?" he asked.

Dell found herself thinking that his teeth formed another white accent to the room's décor. There was something about him—was it his handsomeness?—that made Dell feel he was just a little too good to be true. She said, "Yes, I was."

"Did the stalwart lieu-

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tenant—?" The headwaiter was hovering, and Barlow looked up.

"Excuse me, sir, but I believe you are wanted on the phone."

Barlow started to rise, then immediately dropped back into his seat. "That's impossible," he said.

"Aren't you Mr. James Barlow?"

"Yes, but no one knows I'm here. I didn't make a reservation. How did you—?"

The headwaiter was polite but hurried. He clearly had other duties. "The gentleman on the phone described you and the lady very definitely, and he gave me your name. The phone is in the foyer on the right." He sketched a bow and moved away.

Barlow looked at Dell and shrugged. "I don't get it, but excuse me, will you? Right back."

Dell watched him cross the big room. She felt a vague uneasiness.

He returned to the table in a very short time. He looked upset. "Dell, I'm sorry." She noted the use of her first name; it was the first time he had called her by it. "That was Peters—Pete Peters, you know?" She nodded. "Well, he's practically incoherent. I couldn't understand most of what he said, but I did get the fact that he's down at the corner in a drug store and wants me to come there for a minute. He refused to come here—said he couldn't." He paused and frowned. "'Couldn't'—a funny word. I'm worried about him. Do you mind?"

"Go ahead. I'll be fine. Really."

"All right." He hesitated; then he added, "I'll be right back." He flipped his hand in the little gesture he used so well and for so many meanings. This time it translated to "I'll be seeing you." Then he walked quickly back toward the door. On the way he stopped briefly to talk to a waiter, and then mounted the two steps to the foyer. As the front door closed she noticed that he hadn't bothered to get his coat from the checkroom.

A few minutes later the waiter brought Dell an order of oysters. The gentleman had instructed him, he said, to serve madam's dinner. The gentleman would catch up when he returned.

Dell ate her way through the oysters; then she had some soup and a few bites of steak before her uneasiness crescendoed into dismay. It was certainly a half hour since Barlow had gone through the door; it seemed to her she should do something, but what?

Should she leave? But that would be rude, and, besides, in spite of the existence of the police guard—a shadowy figure Jim Barlow had pointed out when they left her house—she would feel unsafe on the street. She would feel alone, police or no police. And, as a further ridiculous point,

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she doubted that she had enough money with her to pay the check.

Call the lieutenant?—she corrected herself—call the police? But what could she say? That she had been deserted by her escort?

She had stopped eating and was sitting very straight, hands clasped tightly in her lap, when the tall young man in the gray topcoat and fedora came through the the steps and looked around the door. He stopped at the head of room. Then he saw Dell, removed his hat, and crossed to her table.

He leaned down slightly. "Mrs. Kenlon." There was no question mark, but she nodded rigidly. "I've come to take you home." He paused. "Unless you'd like to finish your dinner," he added politely.

"No. No. I don't want— Who are you?"

He looked surprised. "I thought you saw me across the street from your apartment. I'm the detective assigned to you. Police."

"Oh." The shadowy figure Barlow had pointed out. Dell gathered her purse and gloves and rose; when she reached for her coat she found he was holding it for her. But instead of lifting her arms she stood motionless. She said over her shoulder, "I don't think I can pay the check."

He said, "Your coat." And then, reassuringly. "Don't worry about the check."

The people at the next table were staring. She had come with one man, eaten alone, and now another man was urging her to leave. She quickly got her arms into the sleeves of her coat and then moved rapidly toward the exit.

She mounted the thick-carpeted steps to the foyer and then waited while the man said a few words to the headwaiter. Then he climbed the steps and came toward her.

Until that moment Dell had been standing, passively waiting, but just before he reached her she turned decisively, walked to the checkroom counter, and sat beside it on a small straight chair upholstered in jade velvet. As he came up to her she said, "No."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, 'No.' I'm not going anywhere with you."

He looked bewildered. "But I just want to take you home, Mrs. Kenlon."

She put her hand to her forehead. She felt as confused as she had the previous morning. "Where's Mr. Barlow?" she asked. "Why didn't he come back?"

"Mr. Barlow is—unable to come. I'll show you my credentials."

"I won't go with you." That much she was sure of.

He stood in front of her, looking rather foolish. The hat-check girl was watching him with a

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carefully expressionless face.

Dell ignored him. What time would the place close? she wondered, as she looked past him toward the dining room. Well, she'd just sit for a while. Something would happen to clear her mind. Something . . .

The man in gray said, "I guess I understand, Mrs. Kenlon." He walked stiffly across the small foyer into the telephone booth. When he came out he sat opposite her on the chair beside the booth. It seemed too small for him.

And then they sat quietly, ten feet apart. There was almost no traffic. The dinner hour was well on its way, but not far enough along so that people were leaving. The green carpeting had a deep lush pile and the ceiling was efficiently soundproofed. Dell and the man seemed almost alone in a silent green world.

Dell had no idea of how long they held their stiff positions, but when the door opened and Lieutenant Keeley came in it suddenly seemed as if hours had passed. He took two steps inside the door, and then Dell was there in front of him; she had run across the little distance. He took one look at her white face and moved the extra step toward her.

His suit was a scratchy tweed material, but it seemed to Dell, leaning against him, to feel comfortable, exactly as it should feel. His right arm encircling her shoulders was very tight, very secure. She stood still.

Over her shoulder the voice of the young detective said, "I'm sorry, Lieutenant. She wouldn't budge."

"Well, of course she wouldn't. She's frightened." Keeley sounded angry. But not at her, Dell thought. Not at the young man, either.

"Oh. Well, I thought you'd think I should have—"

Keeley interrupted, but more gently, "Never mind. You did right to call me."

There was a little silence, then the young man said, "Shouldn't we—?" He cleared his throat. "People are . . ." His voice trailed off.

Keeley said calmly, "The heck with people."

People, Dell thought. Hat-check girl. Headwaiter. People in the dining room. She brought her face away from the tweed suit and made a small backward motion. Instantly, without seeming to move, Lieutenant Keeley retreated. His face was entirely impersonal. He said, "Shall we go home now?"

Dell said, "Yes. I'm sorry to have—I'm sure you're busy. I'll go with this young man now."

"I'll take you," Keeley said.

They rode home in a sedan that had been parked in front of the restaurant. Keeley sat in back with Dell; the young man sat in

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front with a third man who had been waiting at the wheel. After the lieutenant had given her address to the driver, Dell asked the question, "Jim Barlow?"

Keeley hesitated. "He's been—hurt," he said finally. "I don't know how badly, and I don't know the details. Let it go until morning. We'll see then. How come he wasn't with you?"

She told him about the call from Peters. Then she repeated her earlier apology. "I'm sorry to have taken you away from your home. You *were* home? I didn't—"

He interrupted, "Doesn't matter. My home is an empty, very depressing apartment."

She had not given any real thought to his home. "I wasn't asking—"

"I know that. But there's no reason I should have the advantage." He smiled at her. "I was married, too. My wife died, too. Seven months after we married. Polio."

What should one say? What did people say to her, to the widow of Max Kenlon? She couldn't remember. "I'm sorry," she murmured.

"Well, it was all so long ago. Ten years. Nothing really left." He paused. Then he said in a different tone, "That's it, isn't it? Nothing left. Just emptiness. Like the apartment."

When they reached the house he said, "Carpenter." The young man beside the driver turned around. "Mrs. Kenlon, this is Sergeant Carpenter. He's going to be one of the watchers at your house tomorrow. There'll be other men tonight. You can trust the sergeant if you need help."

Carpenter ducked his head in a little bow.

Keeley insisted on riding up in the elevator with her and waiting until she had unlocked the door. Then he stood on the threshold, hat in hand, and delivered a little speech.

"Please don't feel embarrassed. I realize that you might feel that way, but your fright is entirely understandable. I'd even go a step further: since you didn't know who Carpenter was it would have been foolish of you to have walked out into the night with him. You behaved exactly as you should have. Also, perhaps you had better call a doctor. You see, you are suffering from shock. Very understandable."

He examined the last word, seemed to remember that he had said it before, and suddenly got red. Over the word? Dell wondered. Over his kindness?

He said, "Good night," abruptly, and stepped into the waiting elevator. As the door sighed to its automatic close Dell had a final glimpse of his face. It was tired, concerned, and very, very familiar.

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Dell watched the elevator until it was out of sight.

Daylight had its usual effect. The sun was bright; the day was warm; spring was in the air.

Dell felt more embarrassed in the light of day than she had the night before. Then she had been numb; now she felt that she had behaved dramatically and foolishly. The lieutenant's words were remembered balm. Of course, she had been frightened but, her mind argued back, not for very good reasons.

Poor Barlow had been run over, or he had fallen down and sprained his ankle, or he had had a heart attack, or something more or less dramatic had happened to him. There was no reason to relate all the events of the universe to herself; she would stop doing so immediately. And she certainly couldn't panic for the rest of her life at the sight of every man who wore a gray topcoat.

At ten o'clock an unfamiliar voice came over her phone. He was Officer Johnson, he informed her, and he was calling at Lieutenant Keeley's request. The lieutenant was at the hospital with Mr. Barlow, but he would call Mrs. Kenlon as soon as possible, probably early in the afternoon.

"What hospital? May I go to see Mr. Barlow?"

"I don't know what hospital, ma'am," Officer Johnson said woodenly. "I don't think he can have visitors."

The second comment belied the first. Dell decided Johnson was probably under orders. Still, she tried again. "What happened to Mr. Barlow? How was he hurt?"

"I don't know that, ma'am. The lieutenant will call you as soon as he can."

There was nothing she could do about it. She said, "Thanks," and hung up.

But her morning's first confidence had evaporated. The day might be light and bright, but uneasiness sat heavily and darkly within the apartment. She cleaned the rooms; she called her mother, her office, and her neglected friends, fibbing to all of them.

At three o'clock she had taken to pacing up and down. When she caught herself at it she stopped and went to the phone. When she was told that Lieutenant Keeley couldn't be reached she asked for Officer Johnson.

He came quickly to the telephone and said, "Oh, yes, ma'am, I was trying to get you on another wire. The lieutenant is on his way here, to the station house. He telephoned a minute ago and gave me a message for you—"

She interrupted. "I'm coming down there."

There was a pause. Then he said dubiously, "Well, I guess

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that'll be all right, but he said to tell you to stick close to Carpenter."

After she had her hat and coat on Dell hesitated for a minute. In spite of her determination to rise above fear she found herself unable to leave the apartment thrown wide to sun and air. Feeling cowardly, she nevertheless went from window to window, closing each one and pulling the draw cords that controlled the long heavy drapes.

Through a rear window she saw one of her watchdogs, sitting on an uncomfortable bench and looking out of place in topcoat and hat among the young green of the garden shrubbery. The minute he glimpsed a movement at her window he looked up attentively. It made her feel safer. She smiled down at him and thought he smiled back. It was too far to see distinctly.

Carpenter was a few steps down the street, no longer a shadowy figure to Dell, but a personality. As he came over to her she said, "I'm going down to headquarters."

"All right. I'll call a cab. You won't mind if I ride with you?"

"Not at all. The lieutenant said—"

"I know. I just called in from a booth in a lobby across the street. I can see your front door from there. I got the same message." He smiled. He had a pleasant face, Dell decided, and felt a return of embarrassment.

But Carpenter gave her no chance for embarrassment during the ride. To her question as to whether he had had a boring day he said no, "I've had a parade of astonished men on my hands. You see, our description of the—the suspect is so general. 'Nice-looking' is about the most definite word we've got to go on. Who am I to say who's nice-looking? So every man under sixty and over five feet three who entered your building has had to identify himself. One vacuum-cleaner salesman decided he'd rather skip the house than be searched, and when I insisted on searching him anyway, I found out why. He had the most—uh—peculiar pictures on him. And one resident who's been away and so didn't get a going-over yesterday threatened to call Washington. I even stopped a tall strapping young woman. When she got the drift of my questions I thought she was going to sock me.

"Incidentally, I think you ought to have an inside bolt put on your apartment door. I looked at it yesterday, and it has the flimsiest lock I've ever seen. Anyone could open it with a toothpick."

At headquarters Carpenter guided her through a corridor between linked cubbyholes to a

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door. Keeley was inside. He said, "Thanks, Carpenter," in dismissal, and "Hello, Mrs. Kenlon." The door shut and they were alone in the small office.

The lieutenant looked tired. Dell wondered if police lieutenants always looked tired. Did they all work so hard? Did they all take their cases so much to heart?

At the sight of her his face changed subtly. It was still tired-looking, but it took on an overlay of peace. He said, "You look fine. Sit down."

"Thank you. And tell me, please, about Jim Barlow. How is he? May I see him? What happened to him?"

Keeley's brief moment of peace seemed to have been destroyed. "Yes," he said. "Barlow." He got out of his chair and went over to a wall where he examined a framed document of some kind. Then he turned around and said flatly, "Barlow's dead."

Dell sat still in the uncomfortable golden-oak armchair and stared at him. His face looked tortured.

"Mrs. Kenlon, I don't want to hurt you. I don't know how much that information hurts you—"

She said woodenly, "It hurts me to know a nice young man has died. It hurts me to think that I was responsible, no matter how little I could help it. And selfishly, it hurts and frightens me to know that death is all around me and I can do nothing to stop it. But I'm not—I wasn't—I'm just sorry."

He said, "I see." And she knew he did see. He examined the framed paper again, and when he turned around his face had reverted to normal—little actual expression, but with an underlying kindness.

"What did he die of?" Dell asked.

He came back and sat in his chair. "There's both a simple answer to that question and a very complex one. He was mugged—you understand that. Grasped around the neck from the rear and choked." Dell nodded. "And he was shot. He died of the shot, which grazed his heart. That's the simple explanation. But there's much more to it than that. He died because he was in some way implicated in"—he gestured, looking for a word—"the whole business."

"You mean with the Orcutts?"

"No. I mean in the shooting of Mathias and the things that led up to it and to the attack on you."

"But isn't it the same thing?"

Keeley sat back in his chair and spoke slowly. "No. I guess it isn't. I'm beginning to understand it, but there's so much . . . I think Barlow was shot because he wanted to protect you."

"But you just said—"

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"I don't think he wanted to protect you until he met you. I think, until then, it was decided, either by Barlow or with his consent, that you must be put out of the way. Then he fell in love with you, or came as near it as one can in such a short time. Dying, he had only one thought—to protect you. He didn't say more than half a dozen words, and half of those were 'Dell.'

"You see, although he died of a bullet that entered his back on the right and came out of the left breast, the mugging made it almost impossible for him to speak. The first time he was conscious he managed to say 'Dell.' The second time, when he said it again, I realized it was a question, and I assured him you were all right. When he understood that he said, 'Paroles. Racket.' The last time he was conscious it took him several minutes to manage his words. First he said, 'Protect Dell.' It seemed to cost him agony to get out the next word, but he finally managed 'Cops.' Or," Keeley said slowly, "it might have been 'Cop.'"

It made no sense to her. She said, "But there's nothing in those few words to implicate him."

"Not necessarily, no. But those few words tie in with some ideas I've been developing in the past twenty-four hours. That's what I was fumbling toward when I discussed your pictures with you."

He leaned forward earnestly. "By yesterday, Mrs. Kenlon, the whole Orcutt setup had begun to seem—foolish to me. Too clear-cut. Too melodramatic. And there were some very peculiar little points. For instance, why should William Orcutt want to kill you when all he had to do was go to Kalamazoo, the Fiji Islands, Hoboken—any place? It's true that I suggested he might want to—to remove you as a possible witness. But when the attempt was made I was astonished, because by that time I had realized that Orcutt would have beat it, and fast. And getting out of reach wouldn't have been difficult for him. For one small instance we had no pictures to circulate at travel terminals. So why hang around, go looking for you, invite danger?

"Well, if he were unbalanced he might do just that. But no Orcutt has ever been found committably insane. Criminal, but not crazy. The only conceivable reason we had to think he might be crazy was his comments about 'revenge.' And that, while not strong enough to suggest insanity, did suggest something else to me. Those letters saying, 'Mathias will die; revenge will be had,' were so—fortuitous. The minute Mathias was killed, our suspect was ready-made."

Keeley went on, slowly, "Now,

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there's nothing wrong with an open-and-shut case. Despite the detective stories, murder is usually open and shut. Someone is killed; there is a logical suspect; we pick him up and he confesses, or we can prove his guilt beyond a jury's doubt. But when, on rare occasions, a murder is bizarre and requires real solving, then it's a mass of facts, suspicions, and contradictions. And yet here we have a real fancy one—a tribal feud, a vendetta, and murder for revenge—and it's all neat and prepared for us. Very strange.

"So then I fell back on a little trick of mine that I use every time I get a case that doesn't seem right." He paused for a minute, turned a light shade of pink, and added, "Keep it a secret, if you don't mind, because it sounds as if I'm simple-minded. But it often works. I just ask myself what circumstance strikes me as being *unrelatedly* odd. When people deliberately set about outwitting the authorities they take great care of the related points; it's the things they don't think matter you have to watch for. And a remote oddity came to me: Barlow's presence."

Dell said, "But Barlow wasn't there."

"No. But he was here."

Dell stared at him. "I don't understand."

"Well, you see, Barlow was rarely here at headquarters, because he was primarily a rehash writer. Sunday-supplement stuff. 'Was Justice Done?' That kind of thing. He sometimes went out on news breaks, but I don't think I had ever seen him lounging around the press room before. Ever. So it was a point—that irrelevant, odd point—and I went to work on it."

"I just don't see how."

"Well, George Orcutt and I went through the file of Barlow's articles. It's a file we police keep handy because"—Keeley's full lips drew into a straight line—"because it's such a thorn in our side. Or knife in our back. About three years ago Barlow dropped the question-mark part of his titles. Instead of asking *if,* he started saying that justice *wasn't* done. He—"

The door opened and a man stuck his head in. He saw Dell, said, "Sorry," and withdrew. But before the door had shut, Keeley called out, "Come in, George."

Orcutt came in with obvious reluctance. He gave Dell a curt nod.

Keeley said, "I was about to outline our conclusions in regard to the Barlow clippings for Mrs. Kenlon. You tell her."

Orcutt wasted no time. He stood massively just inside the door and put up his stubby right hand. He ticked off the points on his fingers. "One: Three years ago he stopped dealing with

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crimes of passion—amateur crimes—and took up the cudgels for professionals, usually established criminals.

"Two: Every single professional he wrote about was in the same prison. Just one prison.

"Three: In each case he displayed knowledge that we, the police, thought only we had.

"Four: He very often presented new evidence—facts we hadn't known about that, when we checked on them, turned out to be true—or else had been invented since the crime was committed.

"Five: All these prisoners were released on parole very soon after his articles ran. That's it. Excuse me, Keeley—Mrs. Kenlon."

He backed out. He was not, Dell thought, very happy in her presence.

Keeley said to Dell, "Well, that's almost it. There are a few other things: the articles were well done and very persuasive, but although we couldn't prove it, their premise—that an innocent man had been railroaded—was always false. And Sedgley Mathias had been in that particular prison." He lapsed into a contemplative silence.

Dell said, "I'm sorry, Lieutenant, but I don't understand. I suppose all these things, put together . . . But I don't know how to put them together."

"Of course you don't. Even I—and I'm trained to the job—couldn't do it immediately. But I did begin to get an inkling. And then the manner of Barlow's death, and the fact itself, helped put the pieces together for me.

"First of all, Pete Peters had not telephoned Barlow in the restaurant. Peters was at his home in Brooklyn in the middle of a family party. Besides, the term 'open book' might have been coined to describe Peters' life. So Jim Barlow lied to you. But Barlow did go to meet *someone* in the garageway down the block. Now, if that person wanted to kill him, why not just shoot him? Why grab him and hold on until Barlow was almost choked to death? I think the attacker was trying to get Barlow to agree to something, to force him into it. When Barlow wouldn't give in he shot him.

"Furthermore, Mrs. Kenlon"—Keeley looked very earnest—"I think the point at issue was you—your life or death. An attempt had been made on your life. Barlow had on him the picture of you he told us he had destroyed, the picture Peters took. Barlow had you out to dinner. You—your presence, your picture, your existence—seemed to be the prime consideration. I think Barlow died to protect you."

"Jim Barlow," Dell thought. "A nice young man, or a conniver at murder? Should I feel grateful

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to him for protecting me, for dying for me? Or should I try to believe that he somehow put me in a position where I needed that drastic kind of protection?"

Either conclusion was in the realm of fantasy. She could only feel uncomplicatedly sorry for Barlow. To her he had been a nice young man, simply that. But—

"Why me?" she asked desperately. "What can I possibly have to do with all this?"

"That's the key question, of course." Keeley looked thoughtful. "It seems to me the answer must be the opposite of the reasons that William Orcutt wouldn't have wanted to harm you." He smiled and the wrinkles showed around his eyes. "That's rather confused, isn't it? Well, look: Orcutt could have got out of town. I think this man couldn't. Barlow said, 'Cop.' Since he was trying to protect you I don't know why he didn't give me a name; maybe there was a reason. But if it's a cop, perhaps it's someone you might easily recognize. And you are the eyewitness.

"I think Barlow originally held onto that picture of you because the idea was to hire a gunman. Use the picture as identification. Then Barlow refused to go ahead with the plan. He probably didn't destroy the picture because of—well, sentiment. When he wouldn't go through with the hired-killer idea I think the other man decided to take matters in his own hands—that he had to. And he had to get Barlow out of the way first."

"But why? *Why?*" Dell realized she was hitting the desk softly with her fist. She stopped, looked confused, and added, with an effort at composure, "If it isn't the Orcutts, who is it? What's behind it?"

"Barlow told us that: a parole racket. Barlow and his gang were engineering paroles. Mathias must have learned about it in prison and tried blackmail when he got out. That's the only way it seems to fit. Then it follows that the 'revenge' letters were deliberate. Barlow was probably the brains of the racket, and his articles—very clever, persuasive articles—were a new use for publicity. They manufactured evidence; Barlow 'uncovered' it; then the parole board had to release a prisoner. The point is that whoever shot Mathias couldn't simply get out of sight as Orcutt would have done. He had to stay here—so an eyewitness is an active threat to him."

Dell whispered, "I'm still being hunted, then?"

"Mrs. Kenlon, I'm so sorry." He got out of his chair and went around the desk. He stopped a foot from Dell's chair. "Yes." His voice was very close, but her head

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was lowered and she couldn't see his face. His square hand was on the edge of the desk. The knuckles were white.

"Yes," he repeated, "you're in danger. But it's limited now, don't you see?" There was a pleading note in his voice. "Now that we know what to look for we'll clear it up very fast. We'll check Mathias' associates, and Barlow's. We'll crack down on some of the men who got out on parole. It will be fast, I promise, Mrs. Kenlon. But meanwhile I don't want your nerves to give way. Stay at home. Stick to the policeman assigned to you if you must go out. I'll do anything—everything to keep you safe."

Dell raised her head, stared at Keeley's suit buttons for a minute, and then rose and looked up at him. Her features were in careful control. "All right, Lieutenant," she said. "I'll hold onto my nerves." She gave him a brief smile. "But it's more than nerves, you know. This—this business has robbed me of myself, of my personality. I've become, even to myself, just a symbol of fear—the eyewitness. I want to go to work, to see friends, to go shopping, to *be* someone again."

He made a little gesture of helplessness, almost of pain, and she repeated, "All right. I'll go home now."

"Just a minute." He went to the window. "Yes. Carpenter is waiting in front." He turned around. "Take care, Mrs. Kenlon." It was more than an instruction; it was an urgent plea.

She said, "I will. Goodbye." Then she hesitated. She had a desire to comfort him. "I guess—I guess things *are* more hopeful, aren't they?"

She was aware that he stood in the doorway watching her until she came to a turn in the corridor and walked out of his sight.

Outside, the sun was dying. It might seem springlike, but it was, after all, early in the year. She looked around for Carpenter and found him across the street, standing on the edge of the curb. In his right hand was a shining something that caught the angled rays of the afternoon sun. A cigarette lighter, she thought vaguely, because he held a cigarette between the fingers of the hand that held the gleaming metal, and a wisp of smoke curled away from him. The sun was slanting from his left, cutting across his hat brim and shading the upper part of his face. But she could see the lower part of his pleasant face.

She stood motionless, frozen to the sidewalk. Then his head moved slightly and, although she still could not see his eyes, she knew he was looking at her. For the second time, as in The Jade Garden, they stared at each other across an empty little distance.

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No, Dell corrected herself suddenly—for the *third* time.

The vacuum between them was abruptly broken by a cruising taxi. Dell flung up her hand and when the driver obeyed the signal, stumbled into the cab. "Go ahead," she said urgently. "Just straight ahead!"

At the corner she looked back. No car was behind them and she couldn't see Carpenter.

She gave the taxi driver her home address and said, "Quickly, please!" Then she sat back and fought numbness. This was wrong, she thought. She should go back to the police station. But home was Max and steel doors and familiarity. Home was safety and silence and snugness . . . But Max was dead, and buried on a Pacific atoll. It was time to think of the present. Only she *couldn't* think.

The cab had been going in the wrong direction and now it lost time threading through one-way streets, but the driver, once he got in the clear, began to make good time. Dell scrambled out of the cab at her door, hurried through the little lobby, and mentally pushed the elevator as it creaked slowly upward. When she reached the fourth floor she could hear her telephone ringing. Her stiff, uncooperative fingers seemed to take an interminable time with the key. When she got the door open she rushed through the hall without turning on the light.

The apartment was pitch-dark. She remembered, then, that she had drawn all the drapes. But she didn't waste time going back to turn on the light, she knew every board in the floor. She reached the bedroom quickly and sat on the side of the bed. As she lifted the receiver she turned on the bedside lamp.

It was not Keeley on the telephone. That hope, she now realized, was what made her so anxious to reach the phone. She didn't hear the man's first words, but the voice associated itself in her mind with unpleasantness.

"Mrs. Kenlon! Did you understand me?"

It was the unmelodious voice of Lieutenant Orcutt. "No," she mumbled. "No."

"I'm trying to tell you that Lieutenant Keeley is on his way over. He asked me to tell you." Orcutt had seen her only in terror-ridden extremity; he probably thought her unresponsiveness merely normal stupidity. She struggled for words, but he was going on, "Keeley said to tell you that he'll be there in a few minutes. If anything happens just stall. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said. "Thank you." Then understanding came over. "Yes! . . . Hello?"

But he had gone.

She hung up slowly. She pulled off her hat and put it beside her on top of the purse and gloves

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she had flung on the bed. The lieutenant was coming. She would be all right. She stood up and turned—and there was Carpenter.

Dell screamed. The scream came without her volition, and she said quickly into its echo, "I didn't mean to do that. I didn't mean to scream. You startled me."

He said, "Did I? Who was that on the phone?"

She struggled for composure. She carefully patted her hair into place as she answered, "That was my mother. She wants me to come to dinner. I said I would." Wasn't that all she had said on the phone? Just "Yes. Thank you"? She hoped so. Stall. Orcutt said she was to stall.

Carpenter leaned against the door frame. He looked just like—Carpenter. A pleasant-looking young man in a gray suit. His hat was on the back of his head and she could see his whole face. It was all of a part now; she could add to the description that his eyes were green.

"I was going to make some coffee," she said brightly. Too brightly, she told herself. Try to act natural; try to be the Dell of before. But she couldn't stop the false brightness; she rushed on: "Would you like some coffee?"

He stood still in the doorway, staring at her as he had done before, that Sunday morning. The problem, then, had been whether or not to kill the eyewitness. And the problem had not changed.

"Mrs. Kenlon," he asked, "aren't you interested—aren't you curious about how I got in here? Or why?"

He was perfectly sane, Dell thought. He should have looked wild, but he merely looked uncertain. She would have to feed that uncertainty, make it grow in the right direction. She said, "Why, I presume it was because of the lock. Remember, you told me the lock was too flimsy? You're going to fix it, aren't you?"

He stared unwinkingly at her for a minute. Then he said slowly, "In the dark? It's no good. I'm sorry, but it's just no good. I knew you'd recognize me. I told Jim Barlow you would, eventually."

She had to ask, "Then why didn't you stay a shadow? Why did you let me see your face, at the restaurant, and after?"

He told her, "It was my job as your shadow to get you home when Barlow didn't come back. Besides, Keeley had told me how vague your impressions were—"

They both heard the elevator come to a stop. Its door creaked open and then the heavy, rushing steps were as loud as if they were in the room with them.

Carpenter said in a low dispassionate voice, "That wasn't your mother on the phone." There

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was a gun in his hand.

The doorbell rang.

Dell whispered, "What good will it do you now? Lieutenant Keeley will hear the shot. So what good will it do you?"

"By the time he gets in, after the shot, I'll be out the back door. I sent Dempsey around front. I told him—I haven't time to explain, but I've got it worked out. Barlow wasn't the only one who could plan things. I can, too."

He still looked sane. He also looked forthright, determined. He had solved his problem, now he was going into action. The gun moved upward.

Without hesitation, faster than a clock's tick, Dell's right hand swept outward. The night-table lamp crashed to the floor, and they were in pitch-darkness. With the crash Dell leaped.

It would seem that she had no time for thought, but all life can be planned during the taking of a single breath. And Dell planned to save her life. Logically, Carpenter would expect her to move, and, logically, she could move in only one direction, toward her right. The wall was behind her, the bed on her left, and Carpenter in front of her.

So Dell did the unexpected: she moved to her left. As she scrambled across the big bed the gun exploded with a roar. And at almost the same time there was another shot: Keeley was shooting away the flimsy lock of the apartment door.

Dell stood motionless on the far side of the room, in the corner beside the heavy drapes that covered the window. Should she sit down on the floor? No. Although she would present a lesser target sitting, if it became necessary to move she would have sacrificed easy mobility. This was *her* house, she thought. She knew every inch of it. She could follow Carpenter's blundering movements as clearly as if the overhead lights were blazing. He'd never find that switch he was fumbling for; it was on the wrong side of the door, behind the door. She'd always meant to have it moved.

Keeley's voice was no louder than conversational pitch; it didn't need to be since he was in the inner hall, only a few feet from them. The darkness, Dell realized, was defeating him, too. He said, "Don't be a fool, Carpenter. I know who you are, so what have you got to gain?"

Dell opened her mouth, then shut it tight. "I've never been a genius," she thought, "but I haven't been a dummy, either. If I say a word, I give my position away. For once the lieutenant is not going to think I'm—" She left the thought there.

Carpenter was coming toward her. He made no sound, or if he did it was covered by the sounds of the lieutenant who had

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just run into the bedroom doorjamb. But Carpenter was there, right in front of her, fumbling with the drapes.

She reached out her right hand and very carefully felt for the mate of the lamp that she had swept off the far bedside table. When she had a firm grasp of its neck she bent slowly and reached out into the darkness with her left hand. She touched a bit of rough cloth, and then she heard a smothered gasp.

"Who's the hunter *now?*" she thought fiercely, as she swept her left arm around Carpenter's knees and threw her weight forward. He fell to the floor with a deafening crash and as he hit, Dell stretched far forward, toward his head, and swung the small but heavy lamp base down. She didn't reach his head, but she caught him full on the back of his neck.

Then she stood up.

Keeley said wildly, "*Dell! Carpenter!* Where—?"

"The light switch is behind the door, Lieutenant." Her voice was, she thought with pride, very cool, very self-possessed.

He flicked the switch and then stood still, his arms at his sides, the big gun dangling uselessly. Carpenter lay at full length, his head pillowed in the crook of his right arm, pieces of alabaster strewn across his shoulders and in his hair. Dell was standing on the far side of him, outlined by the heavy drapes. Her hair was in perfect order. She looked charming.

Three men rushed through the outer doorway and scrambled into the bedroom. Two came over and knelt beside Carpenter. The room, filled with light, came alive with their energy and motion. Only she and Lieutenant Keeley were motionless.

Finally he said, "I thought . . . I heard the shot. You didn't say anything."

"I would have given my position away," she chided gently.

"Yes," he said, "of course."

"I was tired of being a dummy," she explained. "Tired of being a—a symbol of fear. I wanted you to know—" She took a step toward him and her knees buckled.

Keeley moved quickly and caught her. "I understand," he said. "But I always understood. You see, *I* am still frightened. I thought you were . . . Come."

He guided her toward the door. Over his shoulder he said, "You'll take over, Stein?" A man said, "Sure, Lieutenant," and went to the phone.

It was comparatively quiet in the living room. Keeley led her to the couch and then sat on the marble coffee table, facing her.

Dell held herself erect. "I'm all right now," she said. "How did you happen to come?"

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"I was watching you through the window. I had just told you to stick to Carpenter, but instead you stared at him and then jumped into a cab alone. You had been so good; *not* a dummy." He smiled. "Your cab was going the wrong way, and Carpenter got one going in the right direction."

That was why the street had been empty, Dell thought.

"So I was afraid he would get here first. I yelled to Orcutt to call you and to send Stein, and then I tore out. And while I ran I realized that it had all been laid out for me last night."

"Laid out?"

"Well, who else knew where you and Barlow were having dinner? Someone else could have followed, but there's no doubt that Carpenter was there. And in his report on the evening he stated that he hadn't heard a shot. The restaurant's entrance wasn't fifty yards from the garageway, but Carpenter said he hadn't heard a thing. It was a stroke of luck for him that he was assigned to guard you, but he'd have found another way. He tried, once, from your garden. Carpenter was the 'cop' Barlow died struggling to identify. And you see—" Keeley paused and looked past her at the wall.

"What?"

"Well, I wonder if he wasn't saying 'Carp—'?"

Poor Barlow. But . . . "It's all over, isn't it?" Dell asked. "I can go to work. I can explain to my mother. I can stop b e i n g afraid—by myself?" She gestured toward the bedroom. "They'll take him away soon?"

"Yes," he said gently. "Any minute."

"Oh. Well, I guess I'll have to move out of the apartment, anyway. I think it has been—spoiled for me."

"That's too bad." The lieutenant sounded concerned. "It's a beautiful apartment. Perhaps we—perhaps you can redecorate it a little." His face had resumed its gentle glow.

Dell contemplated his deepening color. Then she said reflectively, "Yes. Perhaps we can."

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Adventures of Ellery in Queenland

Josh Pachter's first story, "E. Q. Griffen Earns His Name," appeared in the December 1968 issue of EQMM; it was EQMM's 325th "first story." The author was only 16 years old when he wrote about Inspector Ross Griffen of the Tyson County Police Force, a widower with eleven children all of whom had been named after detective heroes (and one heroine) of his youthful reading (with one anachronism which we leave to you to spot). Thus, the Griffen children, helping to solve cases in which their father was involved, "earned" their famous first and middle names—Jane Marple, Peter Wimsey, Albert Campion, John Jericho, Parker Pyne, Gideon Fell, Augustus Van Dusen, Sherlock Holmes, Perry Mason, Nero Wolfe, and the hero of Josh Pachter's "first story," Ellery Queen Griffen.

Naturally, young Mr. Pachter plans to write stories about all the Griffen children; but before getting to Gideon, Augustus, Sherlock, Nero, et al., he has written a "second case" about Ellery. (And who are we to complain?)

When he finished and submitted "E. Q. Griffen's Second Case," Josh Pachter was 17 years old (ah, happy time!—and what a lesson to dropouts), and to celebrate his 18th birthday, in September 1969, Josh "changed his scholastic status from high school senior to freshman at the University of Michigan," where he is now "studying Honors Journalism."

But however hard young Mr. Pachter may be studying journalism, we are sure he will find time for more adventures of Inspector Ross Griffen's children, and especially of "Ellery in Queenland" . . .

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E. Q. GRIFFEN'S SECOND CASE

by JOSH PACHTER

As Garrett Conway strolled casually along the deserted early-morning street, the large bronze medallion that hung round his neck jounced up and down, conspicuously dark against the bright yellows, pinks, and blues of his gaudy metallic Nehru jacket. He wore enormously flared bellbottomed trousers held up by a low-slung leather garrison belt, the huge buckle almost menacing against the psychedelic gaiety of the rest of his attire.

Conway's mod appearance did not end with his clothing. His hair was long and unkempt, and he wore a pair of scraggly pre-Civil War muttonchop sideburns. Even though he was clean, an impartial observer would have sworn he needed a bath.

Garrett Conway was, of course, a hippie. He was not a protesting, sit-stand-or-love-in radical, and he did not play the guitar or the sitar. And since he did not meditate, transubstantiate, or hallucinate, the man had only one way left to prove his hip nonconformity to the world.

Garrett Conway was a poet.

He wrote free verse without realizing that it had ever been liberated; his poems had a certain meter and rhythm, even though his definitions of these terms would have left much to be desired in the way of academic accuracy.

Conway slaved over his poetry, and when a work was completed he submitted it to any one of a number of literary magazines which immediately rejected it. His career was a succession of submissions and rejections *ad infinitum*.

In the field of serious poetry Conway was unpublished, but he did not live in a garret, and he did not starve. He had no objection to sacrificing his ideals to maintain his health, and he was one of the ten or twelve most successful authors of juveniles in the United States. When he needed money, the poet ground out a rhyming kiddie book which would be snapped up by whichever one of his publishers he chose to send it to.

Garrett Conway, unpublished serious poet, walked along the deserted street, and his medallion bounced against his chest, and he never heard the shadowy figure steal up behind him and stab him fiercely in the back.

Conway crumpled to the

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sidewalk, and the figure knelt over his inert body and rapidly searched his wallet and the contents of his pockets. At last the figure rose and, smiling at the effect of the dark red stain on his victim's Nehru jacket, disappeared into the night.

The poet lay still, then finally stirred. He dragged himself to the edge of the sidewalk, and his mind long familiar with the doings of children, painfully detached a loose strip of tar separating two sections of the concrete curb.

Using the tar on the cement, Conway began to write. He made several strokes with his tar pencil, then he coughed up a small amount of blood, and died.

The message on the scrap of paper read, "Graphology is nonsense. You can't tell character from a person's handwriting!" The note was signed: "Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen Griffen."

Ellery Queen Griffen looked up from the piece of paper and said, "Of course, I don't agree with what you've written, Augie, but the *way* you wrote it is very revealing."

"Come on, El," his older brother scoffed, "you can't be serious!"

Five of Inspector Ross Griffen's eleven children were scattered around their father's spacious living room. Jane Marple and Peter Wimsey would not return home from college until the next month's intersession. Parker Pyne was in the process of shutting out a rival high-school baseball team, and Albert Campion, Perry Mason, and Nero Wolfe had just left to spend a weekend with their Uncle James, Ross Griffen's youngest brother, an aspiring author.

"I am so serious!" Ellery replied heatedly. "Just give me a chance and I'll analyze your handwriting right now."

Augustus, resigned, conceded, "All right, go ahead."

"Now then," E.Q. began, "there are thirteen main factors to be considered when you analyze a person's handwriting: size, slope, style, thickness, and so on. Each factor means little by itself, but when combined with the other twelve you can get a pretty accurate character chart. Your writing, Augie, is medium-sized, and all the—"

Inspector Griffen entered the room and shouted a hearty "Hi!" to his children.

"Hiya, Dad," they answered in unison.

Griffen asked, "What are you kids doing?"

"Ellery's teaching us graphology," Augustus chuckled. "He's read a couple of books, and now he thinks he's an expert."

"A couple of books!" Ellery exclaimed, his nostrils flaring. "I've studied Josef Ranald,

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Dorothy Sara, Klara G. Roman, Rudolph Hearns, Billie Pesin Rosen—"

"So what?" Gideon Fell said, supporting The Thinking Machine's skepticism.

Ignoring the jibe, Ellery continued modestly, "And I myself have written a trifling English composition on the subject in which I go into a detailed discussion of some seventy-two handwriting traits."

"But look, Ellery," Augustus commented, "you've known me all your life. You could 'deduce' lots of facts about me through graphology, even if you never—"

"What!" Ellery sputtered. "Are you accusing me of—"

Inspector Griffen quickly intervened. "Sorry to break this up, guys, but it's getting late. How'd you kids like to do something tonight? What about a movie?"

Gideon Fell looked up from the newspaper and exclaimed, "Gee! Kaye Chesterton's new picture is playing at the Majestic tonight. We could go see that!"

John Jericho laughed, "K-kaye Chesterton! Don't you ever think about anything but that t-t-two-bit so-called actress?"

The phone rang.

Inspector Griffen walked into the kitchen and lifted the receiver. He listened intently for several minutes, his off-duty smile dissolving into a scowl. He slammed down the phone.

"Sorry, kids. I've got to get back to headquarters. We'll have to save that movie for tomorrow."

"What's wrong, Dad?" Sherlock Holmes, youngest of the children, asked.

"There was a homicide early this morning," his father explained, "and I thought we had it all wrapped up. Now it looks like we're going to have problems after all."

"Can't you tell us about it before you go?" Gideon Fell asked eagerly.

The Inspector looked at his watch, shrugged, and dropped into a chair.

"Sometimes I think you kids are worth more than the whole Tyson police force," he said. "Anyway, just after one this morning we got an almost incoherent call from a Leonard Goldberg reporting a corpse on Truxton Boulevard. Goldberg had been walking home from a poker game when he discoverd the body. A two-man team was immediately dispatched . . ."

A man was waving wildly from the sidewalk, and the patrol car swerved, coming to a stop by the man's side.

"Goldberg?" Sergeant Verini asked.

"Yes, sir," the man answered, "Lenny Goldberg. Look at—he's dead, officer!"

"That's for us to say," Verini

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said. He bent over the crumpled mass of colors. "D.O.A.," he pronounced coldly . . .

". . .there was a small, thin piece of tar clutched in the dead man's hand. The victim had used it as a crude sort of pencil—"

"A dying message!" Ellery said ecstatically. "What did it say?"

The Inspector smiled grimly and removed a slip of paper from his jacket pocket. He unfolded it, then held it up for his childrens' inspection . . .

"Hey, Bob," Verini called to his partner, "take a look at this!"

Patrolman Robert Lanaro looked down at the concrete in front of the still unidentified corpse. Involuntarily he let out a long low whistle as he stared at the message scrawled quite legibly on the cement . . .

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"As you can see," Griffen continued, "it's just the numbers one, two, and three written shakily, but distinctly, and of a uniform size."

"B-but what does it mean?" John Jericho asked.

"Oh, we know what it means. Once we identified the victim and checked into his background, the meaning of his dying message became obvious."

Inspector Griffen settled back in his chair and tented his fingers.

"Garrett Conway," he said. "That's the name of our young dead beatnik, or hippie, or whatever you kids call them today. He was thirty-five, lived by himself in a four-room apartment on Ryder, pretty high-class for a hippie. Conway made a very good living writing children's books, but his big ambition was to write serious poetry. He's pretty good with the kiddie stuff—you used to like his books, Sherlock—but I've been told his adult work is third-rate."

"The dying message," Ellery murmured. "What about the message?"

"What does it mean? Well, whenever a cop sees numbers like that, the first thing he does is make a simple alphabet substitution. You've done it yourself, Ellery—A for one, B for two, and so on. If you translate one-two-three into letters, there are three possibilities: one, two, three gives A, B, C; twelve, three is L, C; and one, twenty-three is A, W.

"And when we checked out Conway's associates, the first thing we found was that his closest friend is named Andrew Brandon Channing.

"So Conway, near death, translated his murderer's initials into numbers, leaving us a clue to the identity of his killer. Was

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it Channing? The message indicated him, so we put out an all-points. He was picked up several hours ago, boarding a bus for Boston. He claimed he was going to visit his fiancée, Leila Sasloe, but she said she hadn't been expecting him. Channing insisted he was planning to surprise her, but we felt justified in holding him for questioning.

"But we can't get a thing out of him," Griffen concluded. "He says he left his apartment around ten last night, strolled around town for several hours, and then went home to bed. He can't prove it, but we can't prove otherwise."

"Tell us some more about Channing," Gideon said.

"Unfortunately," his father admitted, "there's not much to tell. Channing's record is entirely clean—not so much as a parking ticket. He graduated with honors from an Ivy League university, came here to work on the *News,* and is happily engaged to Miss Leila Sasloe, a girl he grew up with in Boston, his hometown.

"He was very close to Garrett Conway—in fact, Conway was to be his best man when he marries the Sasloe girl next month. Andrew Channing had absolutely no known motive for killing Garrett Conway.

"But Conway as good as named him as his murderer. We've run that 'one, two, three' through the wringer and the only way it makes sense is the obvious one—as Channing's initials."

"But, Dad," said Ellery, "why did Conway have to disguise the initials? Why didn't he just write ABC, or even the name Channing? Why do it the hard way?"

"I don't know, son," Griffen answered. "A dying man's mind often works in strange ways, as you well know from reading the original Ellery Queen books. Perhaps Conway was afraid that Channing might return and, seeing his initials or name on the sidewalk, rub the letters out. Whatever his reason, the meaning of the message is clear. It just doesn't make sense any other way.

"Now, unless one of you kids can tell me how to *prove* that Andrew Channing is a murderer, I'll be off to headquarters."

"I've got it!" Ellery said excitedly. "Just let me examine a sample of Channing's handwriting and I'll be able to tell you if he's capable of committing murder. If he isn't, you can investigate elsewhere, but if he is, maybe confronting him with an analysis of his handwriting will make him confess!"

"Come on, now, Ellery," the Inspector said sternly, "this graphology of yours is all right for fun and games, but this is serious."

"But it works, Dad, it really does!"

"No," said the Inspector.

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"I did pretty well on that Collier robbery."

"Well. . ." said the Inspector.

"It can't hurt to let me try, can it?"

"Oh, come along."

Inspector and Ellery Griffen entered the still-busy Tyson County Justice Building, and headed toward the Criminal Division.

"Wait a minute, Dad," Ellery said. "Before we see Channing, could I take a look at the clothes Conway was wearing when he was stabbed?"

"Why?" the Inspector asked.

"You called Garrett Conway a hippie," the boy explained, "and I'd like to see what you meant."

"I don't see why not," the Inspector said, reversing his direction and leading his son to a frosted-glass door which they had previously passed. "In here," he said.

The Griffens entered the almost-barren room and walked to a large table. Carefully laid out on the table were Garrett Conway's clothes, glorious even after their wearer's death.

As the Inspector looked on with interest, Ellery examined the red-stained Nehru jacket, the bellbottomed trousers, the bronze medallion, and the worn leather boots. He picked up the World War II garrison belt, then turned to his father and asked, "Didn't he have anything in his pockets?"

"Just the usual stuff—keys, change, handkerchief—you know."

Ellery gently put the leather belt back on the table and glanced again at Channing's clothes. "At least he looked like a hippie."

The Interrogation Room of the Tyson County Criminal Division was occupied by three men. One, dressed almost casually in a brown herringbone sports coat and tan slacks, his tie loose and collar undone, stood at the end of a long table and was firing questions at the second man, who was seated, sweating, and scared. A third man, tie and suit jacket draped over his knee, was slumped in a wooden chair in a corner of the room, punctuating his partner's interrogation with an occasional snore.

Inspector Griffen slammed the door and the vocal somnambulist awoke with a start, surveyed the scene, then arose and crossed to the Inspector's side.

"Hi, Greg," Ellery's father addressed him. "Anything?"

"Not an any," the man admitted, struggling into his jacket. Indicating the seated prisoner he added, "Channing here won't give us a thing, sir."

"I've got nothing to give!" Andrew Channng flamed. "I did *not* kill Garrett Conway. He was my best friend. I haven't *seen* him

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since the day before yesterday! I've already *told* you all this!"

"Channing," the questioner continued, "if you didn't murder Conway, what did those numbers he wrote mean? He practically named you as—"

"I don't know *what* they mean," Channing interrupted. "I just know I didn't kill Garrett!"

Ellery whispered "Dad!" and the Inspector bent down. Then he straightened, saying, "Sorry, son, it slipped my mind."

Nodding to the two detectives in turn, Griffen said, "This is Lieutenant Greg Sunn, and Sergeant Thomas Verini. Sergeant Verini was the first of my men to see Conway. Greg, Tom, my boy Ellery. He says he's going to wrap up this case for us."

"Inspector," Verini protested, "this is no—"

"Tom, if it hadn't been for Ellery, Geoffrey Collier would probably be a free and considerably wealthier man today. The boy has an idea, and I've decided to let him try it. What have we got to lose?"

"But—" Verini began.

"Any objections?" Griffen said coldly.

The sergeant muttered, "No, sir."

Greg Sunn, older and wiser than his by-the-book partner, smiled and said, "Well, Ellery, it's about time somebody finished this thing off."

"And just how do you plan to break this case for us?" Verini asked, much too politely.

"He's a graphologist," Griffen explained. "Handwriting analyst. He's going to look at a sample of Channing's penmanship and tell us whether or not he murdered Conway. Would you object to that kind of examination, Mr. Channing?"

The suspect looked up, shook his head, and said, "Anything that'll get me out of this place!"

"Then go to it," Lieutenant Sunn said cheerfully.

The boy smiled and took out a bedraggled pad of paper from his back pocket. He placed the pad before Channing and handed the suspect a ballpoint pen.

"What do I do?" the man asked warily.

"Just write," Ellery instructed. "Anything that comes into your head, and then sign it."

Channing put one end of the pen to his chin and stared at the blank sheet. Finally he began to write—slowly, laboriously, carefully holding the pad steady with his free hand. He finished, then silently returned the pad and pen to the young detective.

Ellery ripped the top sheet from his pad and studied it, making notes on the next piece of paper. After several minutes of scrutiny he said, "I think this should just about wind up the case."

Verini and Sunn stared in-

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credulously at the boy.

Passing the suspect's note to his father, Ellery continued, "Look at Mr. Channing's handwriting, Dad. There are many important characteristics that led me to my conclusion, but I'll just point out a few to give you the general picture.

"Channing's weak, descending finals, combined with his small signature, which slants the wrong way, tell me that he feels unjustly oppressed, and that this oppression probably involves money. Add to that the extensive use of heavy strokes and large capitals and he longs to rid himself of his oppressor, and that he will not let consideration for others stand in his way."

Inspector Griffen signaled to his two subordinates and they joined him. The three conferred briefly, and the puzzled look on the Inspector's face was soon matched by two others. Ellery's father seemed about to speak, then shook his head.

"I'll just mention two more items," the boy went on. "The way his looped letters slant to the left, and the period he put after his signature. Those are sure signs of a vicious nature."

Sergeant Verini stabbed a finger at the sheet of paper and whispered several heated words to the Inspector. Griffen nodded, but remained silent.

"Graphology never lies," said E.Q., "and after examining Andrew B. Channing's handwriting I think I can explain what must have happened early this morning—the events leading up to Garrett Conway's death."

"Inspector!" Verini protested angrily.

"Quiet," Griffen commanded.

Ellery continued confidently. "You were being unjustly oppressed, Mr. Channing, and the oppression involved money, and the oppressor was your 'best friend,' Garrett Conway. I suppose Conway was blackmailing you, and you wanted out. But what grounds did Conway have for blackmail? You've got a completely clean record—what had you done wrong?

"You hadn't done anything wrong, had you, Mr. Channing? But you would have—if you married Leila Sasloe.

"Your marrying Leila Sasloe would have been a crime, wouldn't it? But you thought no one would ever know, and you were willing to take the risk."

"Ellery," Inspector Griffen asked, "what crime are you talking about?"

"Bigamy," the boy replied. "If I'm right, and I'm sure I am, Channing is already married When he was going to that Ivy League university, Channing had been indiscreet with a girl he—let me finish, Dad. Anyway, he finally had to marry her, but they

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managed to keep the whole thing a big secret. His wife probably miscarried—please, Dad, I'm not—"

"Inspector Griffen," Lieutenant Sunn said rapidly, "I think I have to agree with Sergeant Verini. This is getting a little out of—"

"Go on, Ellery," said the Inspector.

"Thanks, Dad. As I said, after Channing's wife miscarried he deserted her. So when Channing decided to marry the girl next door and didn't think anyone knew about his running out on a wife—"

"And just how did Conway know?" Verini asked sarcastically.

"I don't know, and it's not important. He found out somehow, and he had proof and was blackmailing Channing.

"Anyway, Channing waited for his opportunity. And early this morning it came. Perhaps, Mr. Channing, you were waiting outside Conway's apartment house. It doesn't really matter—you followed him and finally the coast was clear. You crept up behind Conway, the man who had the power to ruin your life. You raised your arm—and then stabbed him. And as you watched Conway slump to the ground, blood flowing from his wound, you stooped over him."

Inspector Griffen flinched, and Verini's scowl deepened, but the three officers remained silent. Andrew Channing did not move, but there was an amused half-smile on his face.

Ellery continued, "You pulled the murder weapon from his body, wiped it clean, and put it in your pocket, to be disposed of later. Then you searched the body—but you didn't find what you were looking for.

"Before you left, did you stand there admiring your work, Mr. Channing? How long did you stand over the body, staring at what you had finally done?"

The accused's smile slowly faded. Inspector Griffen and Lieutenant Sunn looked at each other, as Sergeant Verini stood Veliespeechless.

"How long?" Ellery demanded. "And did you just *stand* there, or did you touch the still-warm body? Did you feel the—"

Calm fleeing, the suspect whispered, "No! Stop! Stop it! I didn't—I did *not* kill Garrett Conway! You're lying! I was never married before! You can't prove—Garrett was my best friend, I tell you!"

Ellery stepped to Andrew Channing's side and said, too softly for anyone else to hear, "Martha Horton."

And Andrew Brandon Channing collapsed, sobbing, on the Interrogation Room floor.

Ellery Queen Griffen lay in bed, reflecting on the events of

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the day. He had demonstrated to his brother Augustus the value of graphology, and he had caused Andrew Channing to confess to both a secret marriage to Martha Horton whom he had deserted and to the premeditated murder of Garrett Conway.

And Ellery thought, "Maybe Augie won't be so quick to criticize me now. Maybe he'll realize that being older doesn't always make him right.

"But I guess I'd better lay off the graphology bit, though. If I'd really analyzed Channing's writing instead of faking it, I'd have had to say that he was innocent. His handwriting indicates a timid, affectionate man who is cautious, prudent, and avoids physical conflict at all times.

"But since Garrett Conway's dying message told me where to find conclusive proof of Channing's guilt, I decided to use graphology to make the killer confess—just to teach Augustus a lesson!"

"The answer," Ellery wrote, "obviously lay in Conway's dying message. As a long-time fan of Ellery Queen I've learned not to take any message at face value. My father couldn't think of any possible meaning for that 'one-two-three' except the coincidental one of Andrew Brandon Channing's initials, but he never considered the possibility that 'one-two-three' might not have been the entire message."

Ellery turned a page of his notebook-diary and continued to write.

"In Ellery Queen's *GI Story*, a dying father left the message *GI*, which seemed to indicate that his killer was a soldier, implicating one of his three sons. That's what gave me the idea.* Like the victim in Ellery Queen's *GI Story*, Conway died before he could finish writing. But I can't blame Dad for missing that big point. He hasn't read Ellery Queen for quite a while, and besides, Garrett Conway was a children's poet and he was trying to write a children's poem, and, no matter how smart Dad is, he's no child.

"The message seemed an obvious reference to Andrew Brandon Channing, but its third symbol was not meant to be the number three. If Conway had lived a little longer, he would have had time to put his tar pencil at the top-left end of that 'three' and to draw a line straight down to the bottom-left end—making the letter B.

"I thought that writing Channing's initials as numbers was a little too pat, and so did Dad, but where he tried to find another meaning for 'one-two-three' and

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failed, it took an Ellery Queen to see that the message was intended to read 'one-two-*B*,' and a child to see that kiddie poet Conway, until death stopped him, had started to write the first line of one of the best-known Mother Goose counting rhymes."

"One, two," Ellery said aloud as he wrote, "buckle my shoe."

"Conway's shoes didn't have any buckles," Ellery said, as he handed a piece of paper to his father. "But his garrison belt had a huge one, and cleverly hidden in the back of the belt buckle was a small wad of folded paper—this Xerox copy of a marriage license for Andrew Channing and Martha Horton.

"So the dying man's last message was not merely a clue to his killer's name, it was a treasure map telling you where to find evidence—concrete proof of the murderer's motive."

"And why didn't you show me your proof in the first place?" Inspector Griffen asked, and his voice was stern.

"I guess I should have," Ellery admitted. "But I wanted to prove to Augie that graphology is a valuable science, not just a pastime. Unfortunately, Channing's handwriting was completely devoid of criminal indications, so I had to fake the analysis. And even *that* wasn't enough, so I had to let him know that I had found the copy of the marriage license to make him confess."

"But, Ellery," Griffen said, "there's still one thing. Last night you asked me why Conway wrote Channing's initials in a kind of cipher—well, disguised, anyway—instead of simply writing ABC. Well, why did the dying man go through the rigamarole of writing the beginning of a nursery rhyme—why didn't he just write, or start to write, the word 'buckle'?"

"For the same reason you gave last night, Dad. You suggested that the murderer might have returned to the scene and seeing his initials on the cement, rubbed them out. If Conway had written 'buckle,' Channing would have known just where to look and found the hiding place in the back of the buckle; but the children's rhyme would probably strike him as the meaningless scrawling of a dying children's poet."

Inspector Griffen turned solemn. "Well, son," he said, "you withheld important evidence in a murder case, but you *did* get Channing to confess. I'll let you off this time, but I don't ever want to catch you pulling a stunt like that again!"

And, for the first time in a long while, Ellery Queen submitted meekly to the wishes of his father, the Inspector.

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We are reprinting your Editors' "GI Story," which first appeared in 1954, for those of you who have not read it, or do not remember it. The first book appearance of "GI Story" was in BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR *(1955), edited by David C. Cooke . . .*

GI STORY

by ELLERY QUEEN

ELLERY STAGGERED OFF THE Atlantic State Express in his favorite small town under a safari load of guns, fishing tackle, and sporty luggage, resolved that this time nothing should thwart his summer holiday. But he had hardly dumped his gear when he was called to the phone. Sure enough, it was Wrightsville's chief of police, with a crime.

"I haven't even taken my hat off," Ellery complained. "What do your criminals do, Dakin, watch the Arrivals column in the *Record*?"

"This one's real unorthodox," said Chief Dakin. "Can I send a car right up?"

The lean old Yank was steaming fretfully on State Street at the side entrance to the County Court House. He pulled himself into the police car with one hand and groped for Ellery with the other.

"I've been up most of the night," croaked Dakin. "Remember Clint Fosdick?"

"Sure. Household Fixtures. Slocum near Upper Whistling."

"Got himself murdered last night," said Dakin, reaching for his soggy polka-dot bandanna, "and I can tell you who did it, only I'm not goin' to. I want *you* to tell *me*."

Ellery stared at the author of this extraordinary statement as the car panted across the sizzling Square and began to creep up Dade Street. "Why? Aren't you sure?"

"I wish I was as sure of a pew in Heaven," cried Chief Dakin. "I'm not only sure who murdered Clint, I know *how* he murdered Clint, and what's more I've got him dead to rights with the evidence to convict."

"Then what's the problem, Dakin?"

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"GI," said the chief of police.

"G-what?"

"GI. Do those two letters mean anything to you, Mr. Queen?"

"Well, of course—"

"The only trouble is, it don't fit with my evidence," said Dakin. "And if I can't make it fit with my evidence, a smart lawyer might fuddle a jury with it just enough to put a reasonable doubt in their minds. So you listen to the facts without prejudice, Mr. Queen," the chief said grimly, "and you make that GI fit. Remember the Smith boys—the brothers we've always called the Presidents?"

"Smith? Presidents?"

"Their dad was Jeff Smith—taught American history at Wrightsville High. Jeff married Martha Higgins and they had three sons. Wash, the eldest, was in the war and he's a lawyer now, when he works at it. Linc was in the service, too, then he went to medical school—he's just finishin' his internship at Wrightsville General. And Woodie, the youngest, went into the Army three months back.

"Well, Clint Fosdick was sweet on Martha Higgins since way before she married Jeff Smith. Only Clint was eighteen years older than Martha, he'd never got past fourth grade in school—never even learned to write Spencerian, just printed his letters—and with Jeff, a college man, in the picture Clint didn't stand a chance.

"But in '37, when Jeff Smith drowned in Quetonokis Lake while he was counselin' at a boys' summer camp, Martha found herself a penniless widow with three hungry boys to rear, and there was old faithful Clint, still waitin'... Well, Martha married him," growled Dakin, "and Clint bought that big house on Hill Drive—the one with those hundred-and-twenty-year-old shade trees—for them all to live in like he was standin' treat for the ice cream at a Sunday School picnic."

And the chief's Adam's apple jiggled as the old police car groped for the top of the ridge and began to labor along Hill Drive, between the tombs of Wrightsville's fine old mansions.

"Clint did everything for those boys. He sent 'em to college in style. Gave 'em their own cars, pockets full of allowance money... When Martha died in the flu epidemic durin' the war, Clint became father *and* mother to them. He couldn't do enough.

"And you'd have said they reciprocated. They called him dad. They always remembered his birthday and Father's Day and Christmas. Brought their problems to him—real pal stuff. Young Woodie, the one just went in the Army, ran wild as Ivor Crosby's Ayrshire bull for a while, but Clint kept sayin' he'd spoiled the

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boy; and it's a fact they were mighty close. Linc—the doctor—he's always been kind of studious and intense; Clint swore no man had a finer son. As for Wash, the eldest, he was the easy-goin' sort—too easy-goin' for this world, Clint used to say; he had to bail Wash out of trouble every other Saturday night, a poker debt or a Low Village girl or somethin'; but Clint claimed there wasn't a mean bone in Wash's body.

"Well, he was wrong about one of them," said the old police chief, glaring at Ellery, "because one of 'em's poisoned him, and I'll see the murderin' chuck sizzle like pork sausage in a dirty fryin' pan—if you'll tell me what GI means, Mr. Queen!"

"Glad to," said Ellery patiently, "if you'll only explain—"

But they were drawing up before the simmering Fosdick lawns, and Dakin fell silent. In the stained-glass vestibule they shook the dust from their shoes, and then the police chief led the way through the merciful gloom of the broad entrance hall past one of his young officers to Clint Fosdick's library.

"This is where Clint's housekeeper, Lettie Dowling, found him last night when she heard a chair crash and ran in."

It was a wonderful high-ceilinged, oak-paneled, darkish-cool room, but Ellery found its present musty silence dispiriting. He saw at once where the body must have been lying—the leather-backed swivel chair behind the desk had fallen over on its side, and the Oriental rug beneath was badly wrinkled, as if it had been clawed in agony.

In a litter of papers on the desk lay an overturned cocktail glass. On a tray nearby stood a pitcher half full of an almost colorless liquid. Ellery stooped over the pitcher, sniffing. "Yep, he got it in the cocktail," nodded Chief Dakin. "Clint used to be a teetotaler, like me, but when Martha died he developed a hankerin' for martinis. He'd sit here in his library nights when he'd get to feelin' lonely for her, gulpin' 'em down."

"Who mixed this?" asked Ellery sharply.

"That won't tell you anything. Clint did it himself. I'll cut some corners for you," said Dakin in a deadly voice. "The housekeeper, old Lettie, has her room just off the kitchen. Yesterday mornin', early—quarter past six—Lettie, who's got the miseries and 'd had a bad night in the heat, got out of bed for some aspirins. She heard clinky sounds from the pantry, where the liquor's kept, and she opened her door a crack. There was an almost full bottle of gin that Wash had brought home for Clint on Wednesday night, and through the open

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kitchen door Lettie saw one of the brothers monkeyin' with it. He had a little kind of medicine bottle, she says, in his hand. She saw his face plain.

"Then she heard Clint's voice. Clint was comin' down to the kitchen for his m o r n i n ' coffee—earlier than usual, but he knew Lettie was sick. She heard Clint ask the boy what he was doin', and the boy m u m b l e somethin' and go back upstairs. But Lettie'd seen him put the gin bottle back quick when he'd heard Clint comin' and jam the medicine bottle—empty, she says—in the pocket of his bathrobe. And, Mr. Queen, I've got that 'medicine' bottle. Dug it out of the garbage pit in the back yard late last night where it wouldn't have been if the garbage truck had c o m e yesterday afternoon like it was scheduled to, only it had brake trouble and was held up. That bottle contained poison—if it was full, the way Lettie says it was, there was enough to wipe out half of High Village. And it's the same poison, the Connhaven lab says, that's in the bottle of gin. Besides, *his prints are on the poison bottle.* I've got the devil cold."

"Except, apparently," s a i d Ellery, "for GI. Which is—?"

Chief Dakin carefully removed an uncreased sheet of paper from his pocket. "Clint was makin' out his monthly store bills when he swallowed that cocktail. He must have known right off he was a goner; it's quick-actin' stuff. And the minute he realized he was poisoned he must have known who'd done it. He probably saw the same thing yesterday mornin' that Lettie saw when he was kitchen-bound for his coffee. It must have puzzled him at the time, but what he'd seen told him the answer in a flash when he felt what he'd swallowed. So before he died Clint got hold of his ball-point pen and wrote on this letterhead in that schoolboy printin' style of his. Then he fell over with the chair and all, and died on the floor like a poisoned dog."

"GI?" Ellery reached.

Chief Dakin handed Ellery the paper.

It was an ordinary business billhead. Below the *Clint Fosdick, Household Fixtures, High Village, Terms: 30 Days* inscription appeared in shaky handprinting the two letters:

"GI," Ellery repeated. "And they've all been in the Army, you say?"

"That's right."

"And they were all h o m e yesterday morning?"

"Linc's had a few days off from the hospital. Young Woodie's on

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leave from Camp Hale. Wash lives here all the time."

Ellery was silent, staring at Clint Fosdick's dying message. Then he said, "Does the guilty one know he's tagged for frying?"

"No. Lettie's told nobody but me what she saw, and I haven't let on because of this piece of paper. I've just made out like all three brothers are under suspicion."

"Well," said Ellery. "Could we have the—what did you call them, Dakin?—the Presidents in for a chat?"

The three tall pale young men brought in by their guards were badly in need of sleep and shaves. Their brotherhood was plain from their dark coloring, deep brown eyes, and the way they huddled.

One, a baby-faced variant of the other two in a rumpled U. S. Army uniform, would be Private Woodie Smith. Private Smith's brown eyes masked fear and confusion; his boyish lips quivered.

The second had the keen red-rimmed look of hospitals, and hands so scrubbed they looked bleached—obviously the intern, Dr. Linc Smith. He was gaunt and sharpened down and very quiet. He had been, Ellery would have sworn, crying.

So the third was the lawyer-brother Wash—Wash the easy-going, with a heavying gray face and a softened body. Wash Smith stood there weakly smiling, like a professional comedian caught in a tragedy and trying desperately to think of a joke.

"GI," murmured Ellery. "That's what your stepfather wrote down, Private Smith, and what does it suggest to you?"

"What am I supposed to do," whispered the boy in uniform, "confess because he wrote down GI? I wouldn't kill Dad—why would I kill Dad?"

"Why would Private Smith kill Dad, Dakin?" asked Ellery reasonably.

Dakin said in an exhausted voice, "Because he might not want to wait for Clint to die natural so he could collect his one-third of Clint's estate that's willed to the three Smith boys."

"Let me alone!"

"Woodie," said his brother Linc gently.

"GI," said Ellery. "Comes into your field in a way, doesn't it, Dr. Smith? GI—gastrointestinal?"

The young intern's fatigued eyes widened. "Are you serious? Of course. You can hardly study internal medicine without covering gastroenterology. I even treated Dad Clint for gastrointenstinal flu last spring, at his insistence, although if the Medical Board found out.... And naturally I have access to any amount of poison. The only thing is, I didn't poison him."

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"But the GI, Dr. Smith?"

The intern shrugged. "If Dad had thought I'd poisoned him, he'd have written my name. That would make sense. GI doesn't. Not to me, anyway."

"Or to me," cried Wash Smith, as if he could not wait.

Ellery glanced at the lawyer-brother. "Gin begins with the letters GI. And it was the bottle of gin that was poisoned, Mr. Smith—a bottle I understand *you* brought home for Mr. Fosdick."

"Well, sure, he asked me to," said the eldest brother in a sort of torment. "But what kind of way is that to identify somebody? Linc's right. Whoever Clint thought had poisoned him wouldn't he have written down the name?"

Ellery smiled ruefully; he had been chewing on that one for some time. Chief Dakin's face told nothing.

And suddenly Ellery stopped smiling, as if he had recognized the taste in his mouth. "Presidents," he said. "Presidents! Your blood-father, I'm told, gentlemen, was named after President Thomas Jefferson. And he named his sons after Presidents, too?"

"Why, yes," said Wash Smith blankly. "After the three Presidents he always maintained were the greatest. I was named after Washington."

"After Lincoln," said Dr. Linc Smith.

"After Woodrow Wilson," quavered Private Woodie Smith.

And all three said in one voice, "Why?"

But all Ellery replied was, "Thank you. Would you mind stepping out of the room?" It was only when their guards had herded the three Smiths out that Ellery said to Dakin, "Now I can tell you whom old Clint was accusing of murder."

"I'm listening," said the Chief of Police.

Ellery was looking at the fallen chair as if the old man who had toppled it were still with them, gripping a pen and trying to push it along a billhead before old man Death stopped him in his tracks.

"Dr. Smith is right," Ellery said. "Fancy verbal acrobatics are the pleasant preoccupations of detective fiction. In real life they don't happen. A man who will perform the miracle of forcing his dying brain and muscles to commit a message to paper is not trying to be subtle or clever. If he knows who did the job on him his efforts can have only one purpose: to transmit that information as directly as he can. Clint Fosdick, in writing those two letters, GI, was trying to do just one thing: *Name his killer.*"

Dakin's expression did not change. "GI isn't even a part of any of their names, Mr. Queen. Don't you think I thought of that?"

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"Well, Clint did have a problem, Dakin. Suppose the poisoner had been Wash Smith. Clint must have realized that he might start to write down the name Wash, or Washington, *but never get beyond the first letter*—he knew he was going fast. But if all he could manage to write down were the W of Washington, that W would apply equally to young Woodie, named after President Wilson. So, to avoid being misunderstood, Clint simply began to print his poisoner's *first* name."

"First name?" Dakin blinked.

Ellery blinked back.

"Thomas Jefferson Smith named his three sons after Presidents. So the boys' full names, like Jeff Smith's own, must begin with the first names of the Presidents they were named for. In fact, Private Smith is actually called Woodie, obviously for Woodrow of Woodrow Wilson Smith. Dr. Linc Smith's full name, then, must be Abraham Lincoln Smith. A for Abraham (or L for Lincoln) W for Woodrow (or for Wilson)—neither fits the GI."

Dakin kept blinking.

"But how about Wash-for-Washington Smith," said Ellery, "always having to be bailed out of trouble—probably over his ears in debt and desperately needing his third of Clint's fortune now? There's your chuck in the woodpile, Dakin—the brother Lettie Dowling saw dosing the gin bottle with poison in the pantry yesterday morning. It was George Washington Smith whom Lettie saw, wasn't it? It's his fingerprints on the poison bottle?"

"Yes," said Wrightsville's chief of police slowly. "Wash is my man, all right. But Mr. Queen, Clint wrote GI—and Wash's first name, George, started with GE."

"Tricky," said Ellery, squeezing Dakin's damp arm. "Poor old Clint got the G down all right, Dakin, but he died just as he completed the down-stroke of the E."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 341st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a straightforward, semitough cops-and-robbers story told with admirable restraint . . .

The author, Dante Stirpe, was 41 when he submitted "Grandma's Insomnia." He is a Ph.D. physicist doing experimental research in the field of high-explosive detonation (a far hue-and-cry from cops-and-robbers!). Mr. Stirpe confesses to having been "a voracious reader of mystery stories ever since he was fifteen." A few years ago he began to write mystery stories himself, and "Grandma's Insomnia" is the first of his stories to be accepted for publication. The first? We'll be hearing more from Mr. Stirpe. About the experimental research possibilities of high explosives and crime? . . .

GRANDMA'S INSOMNIA

by DANTE STIRPE

THE COPS CAME FOR ME AT 9:20 in the morning.

Everett, my boss, waved me to his glassed-in cubbyhole by the loading dock and there they were. Two of them. One was heavy-set, with crewcut gray hair and pale blue eyes as cold and icy as the South Pole. The other was younger, taller, and thinner, with the hot angry eyes of a fanatic. He'd read up on me. He hated me just for standing there.

The older one flipped his buzzer, but for all he let me see of it, the badge could have been for the Pipe-Fitters Union.

He said, "Detective A c k l y. You're James Martin."

It wasn't a question but I answered anyway. "Yes."

He jerked his head. "Let's go."

With a one-time loser he didn't have to be polite. He turned and started off. The younger one, Hot Eyes, put a hand on my shoulder and gave me a push. I jumped and let out a groan—I couldn't help myself.

He said, "What's the matter?"

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I turned, scowling at him to hide the pain. "My neck and shoulder hurt. I must have slept crooked." It slid out so easy that even I was surprised.

He looked at me hard for a second, then flapped his hand. "Move."

I moved, following Ackly. Their black cruiser was sitting out front in a No Parking Zone with its nose to the curb and its tail in the street, making trouble for passing traffic. Hot Eyes put me in back and went around to the driver's side. For all his hot anger he drove well, touching the siren now and then to clear traffic. And not taking me downtown to the station, but west toward the suburbs. Nobody spoke. They'd found my car, probably. It certainly hadn't filled them with joy.

Finally Hot Eyes pulled smoothly into a shopping center that had one of those parking lots that go on as far as you can see. Up ahead, glass and aluminum store-fronts shimmered in the bright heat. We made our way to the edge of the lot and pulled up next to a prowl car with a couple of harness cops leaning against it. I spotted my jalopy, partially hidden by a growth of scrub oak, and beyond that an ambulance, its red eye flashing. A dark-suited guy with a black bag was easing out of my car.

The harness cops came to careless attention when they saw Ackly. He nudged me in the direction of my car.

"Yours?"

Who was he kidding? "Yes. Somebody stole it last night."

Hot Eyes laughed, "Hah, hah. Somebody stole it, he says."

My collar suddenly got tight but I didn't turn. I spoke to Ackly. "I reported it this morning, about seven thirty. Somebody named Wayne took the call."

His eyes didn't get warmer but they got a lot more interested. This was something he hadn't known. He looked over my shoulder and jerked his head. Hot Eyes drifted away to check.

Ackly said, "Where was it stolen from?"

"I had it parked down the street from my grandmother's house. On Fifteenth. I spent the night at my grandmother's."

He tried to muster that icy look again, but he was getting uncertain now. A grandmother, yet.

"Your grandmother's? What's the matter with your place?"

"Nothing's the matter with my place. It's just that I go see her a couple-three times a week and sometimes I sleep over."

The dark-suited guy with the black bag touched Ackly's arm.

"Sometime between two and four, Ackly. I can't place it closer than that right now."

Ackly nodded. "Thanks."

Black Bag went away and Ackly turned to me again. "Just

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for the record, Martin, where were you between two and four this morning?"

"I just told you. At my grandmother's. Sleeping. Now, you mind telling me what it's all about?"

He sighed and waved his arm toward the far side of the shopping center. "There was a loan company heist down there early this morning. Then a couple of hours ago we get a call about your car. We're pretty sure there's a connection."

"What do you mean 'a call about your car'? What're you talking about?"

"Look in your car, Martin. The front seat. And watch where you step. It looks like they had quite a fight."

When I went around toward my car I saw what he was talking about. Spots and rivulets of blood were scattered on the macadam surface and also on the grass near the car. And in the front seat sprawled the body of a man. A small dark-haired guy, with his eyes and mouth open and the hilt of a knife sticking out just below his chest. The hilt was dusted with powder. He must have taken a long time to die because there was lots of blood, all over the front seat and on the floor. There was even some on the dashboard and steering wheel.

"Who was he, Martin?" Hot Eyes had come up behind me.

But if he thought he was catching me off base he was crazy. "I don't know. I never saw him before."

"Willie Bleecker, Martin. A small-time hood, just like you. And he graduated from the same college you did."

I shrugged. "It was a big college. I didn't meet everybody. That was three years ago and I'm not a hood any more. And you won't find my prints on that knife."

Ackly took over again. "What time did you get to your grandmother's, Martin?"

"Just before eleven. We had some pie and watched TV and played gin rummy for a while. Till about one o'clock. Then I went to bed."

"And what time did your grandmother go to bed?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. After I did. She's almost eighty and she still tries to do a lot around the house. But she gets tired easily, so she naps off and on during the day. Then she complains she can't sleep nights. She calls it insomnia."

"Let's go check with your grandmother, huh?"

"Mrs. Burton to you," I said, just to let him know she'd be harder to push around than I was.

The ride back was just as quiet as the ride out. Only they weren't so sure of themselves now. After circling the block around my

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grandmother's house without finding a parking slot, Hot Eyes double-parked in front.

I pushed the front-door bell with the two of them crowding me on the steps. In a few seconds the door opened and Grandma looked at me with her bright brown eyes.

"Hello, James. Back so soon? Did they find your—" She trailed off when she saw the two behind me.

"Yes, Grandma, they found my car." We went into the living room. "These two men are detectives, Grandma, and they want to talk to you about—"

"We'll tell her about it, Martin," Ackly interrupted. He nodded to Hot Eyes and waved his hand. "Take him in the kitchen. And close the door."

We went into the kitchen where I busied myself heating up some water for tea. Grandma and I liked tea. Hot Eyes and me didn't find anything to talk about. His kind and mine never would.

The kitchen door opened just as the water started to boil.

Grandma said, "Oh, you're making tea. How nice. Would you stay for tea, Mr. Ackly?"

Ackly shook his head and said to Hot Eyes, "Let's go." Then he gave me a long careful look. "We'll find our own way out."

Grandma saw them out anyway, and stayed at the door until their car drove away. When she got back I had the tea ready and was sitting at the kitchen table. She took a sip and sighed contentedly.

"What'd you tell him?" I asked.

She smiled. "Only what happened, dear. That you went to bed about a quarter after one and I went at three thirty, after looking in on you. You were sleeping like a baby, I told them. And I explained about my insomnia. Don't look so worried, dear."

"I don't know. That Ackly's a bloodhound. He won't let go."

"Of course he will, dear. Especially when he finds no proof you were involved."

I nodded absently, still worried.

"How's your shoulder, dear?"

"Okay. It still hurts but I think it'll be okay."

"It's a good thing I used to be a nurse. But it really needs a few stitches, dear." She sighed. "It's a shame he was so greedy."

"Greedy? Oh, Bleecker, you mean."

"Yes. Coming at you with that knife to get all the money."

"It was a surprise, all right."

"And you don't want to be greedy, either, do you, James?"

"Me? Greedy?"

"Yes, James. That nice detective told me. Did you think I wouldn't find out? You got five thousand dollars, not three. And my insomnia costs fifty percent, remember?"

I sighed. "Yes, Grandma."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 342nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a "neat and orderly" story, most tidily written for a "first" . . .

We have tried to learn something about the author, Mary Barrett, but all our inquiries about her background, hobbies, and writing aims have elicited no reply. We are not even sure that Mary Barrett is the author's real name. And since obviously the author wants no invasion of her privacy, we respect her wishes. We do hope, however, that we'll see more of her work . . .

THE SILVER SALTCELLAR

by MARY BARRETT

METHODICALLY SHE PUT THE key in the lock of the front door, with a feeling of pleasant anticipation.

"It's so nice," she thought, "to know that everything will be exactly where it belongs."

Orderliness was very important to her. It made life so easy and so comfortable and so predictable, as she had tried for years to explain to her mother. But all her pleas had gone unheeded. Her disorderly mother went cheerfully through her days, leaving things wherever they happened to fall. Well, everything would be different now that her mother was dead.

She opened the door and looked approvingly at her neat uncluttered living room. Each piece of furniture was in place, each surface was polished, and the shades were drawn to exactly the right length so that the sun would not fade the upholstery. Yes, everything was immaculate. Everything was tidy.

The funeral that afternoon had been very successful, she thought. That courteous undertaker had managed the affair very nicely. She nodded approval as she recalled his quiet efficiency. He and she had recognized in one another the rare virtures which each so highly valued—the virtues

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of efficiency and neatness.

She walked through the dining room into the kitchen, taking the route which she could now establish as permanent. Now she could set up her own schedules. With her mother out of the house it would be much easier to keep things spic and span.

It had been very difficult, especially toward the end. The old woman had become forgetful, and things were often found in inappropriate places. Once she had even discovered the sterling silver saltcellar in the refrigerator! She confronted her mother with the fact, but the only responses were a chuckle and the remark, "Well, the old brain plays odd tricks sometimes, doesn't it?"

Shocking that anyone could be so unconcerned! No, it was much better to have the house to one's self. Much more efficient.

She smiled as she thought of the sterling saltcellar. She certainly had managed to get even with her mother for that carelessness! Thinking of the neatness of the plan which she had carried out so successfully, she hummed a tune as she moved about the kitchen.

She took an apron off its hook, tied it around her waist, and set a pan of water on the stove to boil—for the one egg which she would eat for supper.

That was another thing. She shook her head as she remembered. She had never been able to make her mother understand how necessary it was to eat the same things every day, in order to insure a properly balanced diet. Her mother always had the evening meal begun before she got home from work, and she never knew ahead of time what would be served.

"But, dear," her mother would protest, in answer to her constant criticism, "I enjoy a little variety in life."

Her mother could never understand that variety was the very thing the world had *too* much of. It was the duty of every conscientious person to take out of life as much variety as possible, not to put more in.

She took a knife from a rack and sliced a tomato. She smiled as she remembered her mother's surprise when she was so agreeable about the curry they ate for their last meal together.

Her mother had remarked "Why, dear, you haven't been such pleasant company for some time."

The two of them had worked together in the kitchen, putting the final touches to their supper, and then they had sat down to eat, in unusual amity.

She was very considerate of her mother that evening, taking pains to do the small things she knew want her mother to notice the would be pleasing. She did not

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one unusual thing which she had to do to make her plan work. Carefully, and unaccustomedly, she set the sterling saltcellar beside her mother's plate. She knew very well that her mother would add seasoning, as she always did to every dish, even though the curry was already much too highly spiced for good digestion.

And so, in the night, her mother died. She was old. She had been failing for some time. There was no apparent need for an autopsy. Certainly no one had entertained the slightest thought of examining the contents of the sterling silver saltcellar. Yes, everything had gone very well, exactly as planned.

Her egg was boiled now. Carefully she put it in the center of her plate. She arranged the slices of tomato neatly around the egg, then set the plate neatly in the middle of the place mat on the kitchen table. She sat down to eat her evening meal, content and happy.

This was how it would always be from now on. She thought happily of the hundreds of orderly, planned meals to come, and of the long stretch ahead of unbroken routine.

She ate the last bite, carried the dish to the sink, and rinsed it thoroughly under the cold-water faucet. She bent down to take the pan from under the sink—and felt a sudden, dizzying pain in her stomach. Shocked and bewildered, she fell back into the chair by the table.

Her amazement at the sight of the sterling saltcellar was almost as overwhelming as the pain. It was exactly where it should be, in the precise center of the table. She had used it to salt her egg.

Even through the pain, she was aware of feeling mildly irritated. She had meant to empty the saltcellar, of course; but these past few days had been so disorganized. She had intended, in fact, never to use the sterling saltcellar again, in case it was no longer sanitary. She had been using the cut-glass shaker instead; but this morning, before she left the house, she had tidily put the cut-glass shaker in the china closet, where it belonged.

She had a vague thought that this final annoyance must be, somehow, her mother's fault. Certainly all the past irritations of her life had been. She couldn't exactly formulate the idea, however—the pain made her thoughts run together, become jumbled, deranged.

And then, she wondered, just before unconsciousness came and she fell in disarray to the floor, what would that nice undertaker think? It was certainly improper, and very slovenly, to have two deaths in the same house in such a short time.

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a *NEW* puzzle story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Isaac Asimov needs no introduction to readers of EQMM. At the time of this writing, Mr. Asimov has just celebrated the publication of his 100th book in the fields of science and science fiction (a truly remarkable accomplishment) and he is still going strong—indeed, going stronger than ever.

For a long time we have considered it a pity that Isaac Asimov's work has not appeared in EQMM. But the simple truth is, he never sent us a story. Mr. Asimov has now rectified this oversight, and we are pleased to offer you a new Asimov short-short written especially for EQMM. It is a "pure" cipher-mystery (and how welcome the rebirth of the code-or-cipher story has been these past few years!) which, while not involving a crime, has a contemporary "Thinking Machine" quality. And Mr. Asimov promises, now that he is officially a contributor to EQMM, to put his very special 'tec talents on paper for coming issues . . .

A headnote of unusual interest about Isaac Asimov's work: you will recall that in the November 1968 and December 1968 issues of EQMM we gave you the first two Supplements to QUEEN'S QUORUM *(A History of the Detective-Crime Short Story as Revealed by the Most Important Books published in this Field since 1845), reissued in 1969, with both Supplements, by Biblo and Tannen Booksellers and Publishers, Inc., 63 Fourth Avenue, New York, New York 10003. Supplement Number Two ended with EQ's nominations to QQ for the year 1967. Quite a few readers sent us comments—some disagreeing with new QQ selections and some suggesting omissions in QQ. But the largest number of letters concerned a book published* after *the last year covered by Supplement Number Two. Readers reminded us—even warned us!—not to omit a certain book of short stories if and when we compiled Supplement Number Three. That book is* ASIMOV'S MYSTERIES, *published by Doubleday just after 1967 (on January 5, 1968). This is the first time that a possible inclusion*

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in QUEEN'S QUORUM *has ever been anticipated, has ever been "demanded" in advance!*

And now match wits, if you care to accept the challenge, with Isaac Asimov's Professor Neddring . . .

A PROBLEM OF NUMBERS

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Professor Neddring looked mildly at his graduate student. The young man sat there at ease; his hair was a little on the reddish side, his eyes were keen, but calm, and his hands rested in the pockets of his lab coat. Altogether a promising specimen, the professor thought.

He had known for some time that the boy was interested in his daughter. What was more to the point, he had known for some time his daughter was interested in the boy.

The professor said, "Let's get this straight, Hal. You've come to me for my approval before you propose to my daughter?"

Hal Kemp said, "That's right, sir."

"Granted that I'm not up on the latest fads of youth—but surely this can't be the new 'in' thing." The professor thrust his hands into his lab-coat pockets and leaned back in his chair. "Surely young people aren't taking to asking permission these days? Don't tell me you'll give up my daughter if I turn you down?"

"No, not if she'll still have me, and I think she will. But it would be pleasant—"

"—if you had my approval. Why?"

Hal said, "For very practical reasons. I don't have my doctor's degree yet and I don't want it said that I'm dating your daughter to help me get it. If you think I am, say so, and maybe I'll wait till after I get my degree. Or maybe I won't and take my chances that your disapproval will make it that much harder for me to get my degree."

"So for the sake of your doctorate you think it would be nice if we were friends about your marriage to Janice."

"To be honest, yes, Professor."

There was silence between them. Professor Neddring thought

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about the matter with a certain creakiness. His research work for some years now had dealt with the coordination complexes of chromium and there was a definite difficulty in thinking with some precision about anything as imprecise as affection and marriage.

He rubbed his s m o o t h cheek—at the age of 50 he was too old for the various beard styles affected by the younger members of the department—and said, "Well, Hal, if you want a decision from me I'll have to base it on something, and the only way I know how to judge people is by their reasoning powers. My daughter judges you in *her* way but I'll have to judge you in *mine.*"

"Certainly," said Hal.

"Then let me put it this way." The professor leaned forward, scribbled something on a piece of paper, and said, "Tell me what this says, and you will have my blessing."

Hal picked up the paper. What was written on it was a series of numbers:

6966371726337683304 7.

He said, "A cryptogram?'

"You can call it that."

Hal frowned slightly. "You mean you want me to solve a cryptogram and if I do, then you'll approve the marriage?"

"Yes."

"And if I don't, then you *won't* approve the marriage?"

"It may sound trivial, I admit, but this is my criterion. You can always marry without my approval. Janice is of age."

Hal shook his head. "I'd still rather have your approval. How much time do I have?"

"None. Tell me what it says *now*. Reason it out."

"Now?"

The professor nodded.

Hal Kemp shifted in his chair and stared at the row of numbers in his hand. "Do I figure it out in my head? Or can I use pencil and paper?"

"Just do it. Talk. Let me hear how you think. Who knows? If I like the way you think, I may give my approval even if you don't solve it."

Hal said, "Well, all right. It's a challenge. In the first place, I'll make an assumption. I'll assume you're an honorable man and would not set me a problem that you knew in advance I couldn't solve. Therefore this is a cryptogram which, to the best of your judgment, is one I can solve sitting in this chair and almost on the spur of the moment. Which in turn means that it involves something I know well."

"That s o u n d s reasonable," agreed the professor.

But Hal wasn't listening. He continued, deliberately, "I know the alphabet well, of course, so this could be an o r d i n a r y substitution cipher—numbers for

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letters. Presumably, it would have to have some subtlety if it were, or it would be too easy. But I'm an amateur at that sort of thing and unless I can see at once some peculiar pattern in the numbers that gives the whole thing meaning, I'd be lost. I notice there are five 6's and five 3's and not a single 5—but that means nothing to me. So I'll abandon the possibility of a generalized cipher and move on to our own specialized field."

He thought again and went on, "Your specialized field, Professor, is inorganic chemistry and that, certainly, is what mine is going to be. And to any chemist, numbers immediately suggest atomic numbers. Every chemical element has its own number and there are one hundred and four elements known today; so the numbers involved would be 1 to 104.

"You haven't indicated how the numbers are divided up. There are the one-digit atomic numbers from 1 to 9; the two-digit ones from 10 to 99; and the three-digit ones from 100 to 104. This is all obvious, Professor, but you wanted to hear my reasoning, so I'm giving it to you in full.

"We can forget the three-digit atomic numbers since in them a 1 is always followed by a 0 and the single 1 in your cryptogram is followed by a 7. Since you've given me twenty digits altogether, it is at least possible that only two-digit atomic numbers are involved—ten of them. There might be nine two-digit ones and two one-digit ones, but I doubt it. Even the presence of two one-digit atomic numbers could result in hundreds of different combinations of places in this list and that would surely make things too difficult for an instant or even a quick solution. It seems certain to me, then, that I am dealing with ten two-digit numbers, and we can therefore turn the message into: 69, 66, 37, 17, 26, 33, 76, 83, 30, 47.

"These numbers seem to mean nothing in themselves, but if they are atomic numbers then why not convert all of them into the names of the elements they represent? The names *might* be meaningful. That's not so easy off-hand because I haven't memorized the list of elements in order of their atomic numbers. May I look them up in a table?"

The professor was listening with interest. "I didn't look up anything when I prepared the cryptogram."

"All right, then. Let's see," said Hal slowly. "Some are obvious. I know that 17 is chlorine, 26 is iron, 83 is bismuth, 30 is zinc. As for 76, that's somewhere near gold which is 79; that would mean platinum, osmium, iridium. I'd say it means osmium. The other two are rare earth elements and I can never get those straight. Let's

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see—let's see—All right. I *think* I have them."

He wrote rapidly and said, "The list of the ten elements in your list is thulium, dysprosium, rubidium, chlorine, iron, arsenic, osmium, bismuth, zinc, and silver. Is that right?—no, don't answer."

He studied the list intently. "I see no connections among those elements, nothing that seems to give me any hint. Let's pass on then and ask if there is anything besides the atomic *number* that is so characteristic of elements that it would spring to any chemist's mind at once. Obviously, it would be the chemical *symbol*—the one-letter or two-letter abbreviation for each element that becomes second nature to any chemist. In this case the list of chemical symbols is"—he wrote again—"Tm, Dy, Rb, Cl, Fe, As, Os, Bi, Zn, Ag.

"These might form a word or sentence, but they don't, do they? So it would have to be a little more subtle than that. If you make an acrostic out of it and read just the first letters, that doesn't help, either. So if we try the next most obvious step and read the second letters of each symbol in order, we come out with 'my blessing.' I presume that's the solution, Professor."

"It is," said Professor Neddring gravely. "You reasoned it out with precision and you have my permission, for what that's worth, to propose to my daughter."

Hal rose, turned to leave, hesitated, then turned back. He said, "On the other hand, I don't like to take credit that's not mine. The reasoning I used may have been precise, but I offered it to you only because I wanted you to hear me reason logically. Actually, I knew the answer before I began, so in a way I cheated and I've got to admit that."

"Oh? How so?"

"Well, I know you think well of me and I guessed you would want me to come up with a solution and that you wouldn't be above giving me a hint. When you handed the cryptogram to me you said, 'Tell me what this says, and you will have my blessing.' I guessed that you might mean that literally. 'My blessing' has ten letters and you handed me twenty digits. So I broke it down into ten pairs at once.

"Then, too, I told you I hadn't memorized the list of elements. The few elements I did remember were enough to show me that the second letters of the symbols were spelling out 'my blessing,' so I worked out the others from among those few that had the proper second letters in *their* symbols. Do I still make it?"

Professor Neddring finally smiled. He said, "Now, my boy, you *really* make it. Any competent scientist can think logically. The great ones use intuition."

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Attention, please! Beginning with this issue, under the new format above, your well-intentioned if maundering critic will be allowed more space wherein to maunder on about mystery in general and current mysteries in particular. Kindly refrain from audible groans or hisses.

"For all your constant griping about poor work," I was told, "not once have you held up and pulverized a book by title or author. In the future, when you feel you must get after somebody, here's your opportunity."

And yet, except under unusual circumstances, I think I shall not avail myself of the privilege. Too well I remember words once spoken by an old acquaintance, Milward Kennedy, who more than thirty years ago reviewed for a London Sunday newspaper.

"Why should I waste my time and the reader's," he said, "airing all the faults of *Admirals Die Laughing* or *There's No Place Like Homicide?* Let me find something most customers can enjoy, and ignore ineptitude not worth bothering about."

My corollary reason for infrequent use of the bastinado does not arise, God knows, from innate kindness of heart. It arises from the quenchless hopefulness of the mystery-lover. Having devoured sensationalism since boyhood, we old-timers can recall several authors who couldn't write, couldn't construct, and couldn't play fair, but could come up with some highly ingenious solution that atoned for everything. Today, tackling a story which begins badly and continues worse, no optimistic judge will fling it aside in mid-course. "Give the poor devil a chance!" whispers that inner voice. "Maybe he's got something up his sleeve; read on and finish."

Experience teaches that the author who trips over his own feet in chapter one is unlikely to become an expert gymnast by chapter twenty. But it did happen in those bad old days. And at least the new book has been honorably treated. *You* needn't read the damn thing; no harm is done.

It would be pleasant to inaugurate this expanded column by naming four first-rate new novels. I can't do that, but I can offer

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you three. If one of them is a paperback original modestly priced, that's all to the good. Our fourth item will be a classic detective story of the early nineteen twenties, also available at uninflated cost. Worthy paperbacks have saved the situation so often that your correspondent can feel profoundly grateful.

In *Death at the Chase,* by Michael Innes (Dodd, Mead, $4.50), retired Police Commissioner Sir John Appleby, of Long Dream Manor, during his afternoon walk encounters a mouldering mansion which might almost be called Long Sleep Manor.

At Sir John's first meeting with long-lived Martyn Ashmore, scion of the long-lived Ashmores, a great weight of stone crashes down from the roof, just missing them both. Somebody wants to kill parsimonious Martyn, either for reasons dating back to World War II, or for reasons more immediate. Though surrounded by unattractive elderly people of his own generation, the old skinflint does die (no cerebro-vascular accident, surely?) amid attractive young people who include Bobby Appleby, Sir John's son.

This essay in detection, told with all Mr. Innes's customary charm, centers round the problem of a view by firelight and of something the witness didn't quite see. You yourself may not see, but it's worth a try.

The Pushbutton Butterfly, by Kin Platt (Random House, $4.95) introduces us to Max Roper, semi-official security investigator, as knowing and with-it as any detective of his tribe.

Janet Sanders, the daughter of a West Coast electronics tycoon, has disappeared from her classes at Berkeley. She may be anywhere; she may be nowhere; she must be traced.

Beginning with the strangled (and also vanishing) Mexican girl who has shared Janet's apartment, Max Roper stumbles along a track of drugs, double bluff, pornographic art, and more corpses. If our investigator sometimes seems almost too desperately knowing, even smart-aleck, he needs armor against so many desperately knowing weirdos: that red-headed doll of slippery aspect, the student agitator less devoted to human beings than to agitation, the hopped-up Hell's Angel with a steel plate in his head.

Max, though with it, is often *hors de combat.* When they can't knock him out by fist or bludgeon, they manage well enough with sleep-inducing atomizers or cups of tea. But don't let the book's fast action fool you into thinking its ending will be clumsy or naive. The author has fashioned an intricate, soundly constructed labyrinth, evil minotaur and all.

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That very sympathetic secret agent, Sam Durell of the C.I.A., meets his most fantastic challenge with *Assignment—White Rajah,* by Edward S. Aarons (Fawcett, 60¢). Over Pasangara, riot-torn province in Malaya, United States Navy fighter planes have roared towards the inner hills and failed to return. Where are those planes?

Officially neither pro-American nor pro-Communist, this strip of Southeast Asia has its own government under Premier Kuang. With a temporary post at the Amercan Consulate, Sam Durell must learn what has happened to the lost planes and their pilots. But Premier Kuang plans to expel him as undesirable. Colonel Tileong wants him jailed or dead. Even George Hammond, an old C.I.A. friend, seems to be obstructing Sam's mission. Every hand is against him.

Every hand? In imperialistic days the whole area was once ruled by each male descendant of an English adventurer, Anthony Merrydale, as White Rajah of Pasangara. The present rajah—old, deposed, living on sufferance—has two grandchildren of Anglo-Malayan blood. His grand-daughter, a raving beauty with a questionable past, has dropped her English name to be known only as Pala Mir. Yet, when Durell saves her life in a riot, the girl herself offers to help.

If he can reach an old palace in a distant mountain, he may discover what he wants to know. Both Pala Mir and grandpa lend aid through the jungle, with Communist guerillas ahead and Colonel Tileong in pursuit. After learning the trick of hijacking planes without suspicion, after nailing the traitor behind it all, Sam Durell reaches a conclusion as satisfactory as his last night with Pala Mir. Any reader will be happy too.

A.A. Milne's *The Red House Mystery* (Avon, 95¢) seems almost forgotten now that so many crooked dark roads have become a roaring thruway. I read the book on its first appearance in 1922; as might have been predicted, it seemed insufficiently sensational. For the very young devotee, who judges all detectives by Sherlock Holmes and all figures of menace by Dr. Fu Manchu, anything short of exaggerated omniscience or exaggerated villainy will fail to satisfy. I have read it twice since then: I couldn't have been more mistaken.

A.A. Milne, dead these fourteen years, was the only writer whom London's Detection Club elected to full membership on the strength of one novel alone. It belongs among the first of those countryside chronicles wherein the lawn-mower's whir is cut short by a revolver shot, the detective as human as the murderer, the evidence in sight. It was a fine achievement then; it remains a fine achievement today.

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It is our usual policy to offer biographical information only on new writers, especially those who are "breaking into print" for the first time. But, as always, there are exceptions to the rule. The author of "Play It Safe" has such an interesting background that we can't resist giving you some of the details.

Phil Richards is an "old pro." We don't mean this in terms of age—we don't know how old he is. We mean his productivity. His work has appeared in "Black Mask," "Short Stories," "Detective Story," "Detective Fiction Weekly," and in other magazines of what Mr. Richards calls "a simpler day." Actually—oh, nostalgia!—he wrote under 17 "house names" for the old Street and Smith "pulps."

Most of his stories had their origin in his own experiences—which, Mr. Richards claims, was "standard" in those days for any prolific adventure-story writer. He spent years at sea, five of them along the China Coast; he fought four-round preliminaries in San Francisco, Manila, New York, and Juarez. In a Greenwich Village apartment at the outbreak of World War II he collaborated with John Banigan, who had been a mate on the torpedoed "Robin Moor," to write a seaman's manual titled HOW TO ABANDON SHIP. *The War Department offered to buy all rights to the book, and tremendous printings were distributed to the Armed Forces. A few months later, Mr. Richards' ship was torpedoed off Casablanca.*

And that isn't all. The author has worked as, among other occupations, a lumberjack, an Erie Canal pilot, and a longshoreman—"all proper training," he observes, "for being employed now in a college library."

Here's the "old pro" of the grand old "pulps"—still going strong . . .

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PLAY IT SAFE

by PHIL RICHARDS

SHORTLY AFTER FIVE IN THE evening they escaped from Sontag Penitentiary in the trunk compartment of the prison surgeon's car. Curled up in the darkness, Lou Britt cupped his hand over a pencil flashlight to see how his companion was taking it. Nick Tully was his name, but he was John Q. Nobody to Lou, and he showed all symptoms of a dedicated loser—cold sweat, lips trembling, eyes of a man being strapped in the gas chamber.

The car stopped. They were at the prison gate.

"We're almost there," Lou whispered into Nick's ear. "Don't blow it!"

Lou doused the flash. He could hear Nick's ragged breathing. This guy had to go. What was there to sweat about? In the months they'd been checking the doctor's evening departure, not once had the guards opened the trunk. If they lifted the cover now, what of it? He and Nick would be sent to solitary, and their chances of parole would be shot; but at best parole would have been eight years away, and by then, the way the world was going, inmates everywhere would be running the asylums.

They heard the doctor and the guards talking, then the crunch of gravel around the car. Lou put his hand over Nick's mouth. He felt fingernails dig into his wrist. This guy was a clinger. You'd never go far with him.

Lou himself was all set for the trunk to open. He'd play it coy, good-humored.

"Peek-a-boo," he'd say.

The car started up. Then they were out of the gate, free. Soon every law-enforcement agency in the country would be alerted. Nick Tully would never make it past the first roadblock and Lou didn't plan to jeopardize his own future by letting Nick get caught.

When he could tell by the roar of traffic that they were on the highway, Lou raised the trunk cover a crack. He had used a bit of plastic to prevent the lock from engaging. They were heading north now at 60. Good. With a few hours of daylight and a little luck they should reach the small farm of Nick Tully's uncle not long after dark.

The car turned off the highway and stopped. Piecing together scraps of talk in the prison hospital, Lou had learned that ten or twelve miles from the peniten-

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tiary the doctor usually stopped at a friend's tavern.

When Lou was sure the doctor had gone in, he raised the cover. They were in a large parking lot with many cars around and no sign of an attendant.

"Now stay loose," he told Nick. "You're wearing a bright fresh sports shirt and gray slacks and suéde shoes. Your hair is neatly trimmed; you're tanned; you'll have a light sweater over your arm and a package under it."

The package contained the white duck trousers, white shirt and jacket that each had worn as a nurse's aide in the prison hospital.

"Nick, you look just like another college kid on vacation. Act like one."

They got out of the trunk. In ordinary sports clothes, carrying a package and with a dark blue blazer on his arm, Lou also had the campus look.

"I'll cross-wire the ignition," Nick said nervously, "and get a car started."

"Are you completely nuts?" Lou said. "Nobody knows how we escaped or which way we went. Take a car from here and they'd figure we left the prison with the doctor. We walk!"

They traveled on foot along the highway's shoulder for about a mile. A motorist slowed down to give them a lift, but Lou nonchalantly waved him on.

"Why'd you do that?" Nick demanded.

"This is where we detour," Lou said, pointing to a side road. "We're sticking to small towns and country roads until we reach your uncle and get his loot."

Why, he asked, hadn't Nick stuck to something he could handle, like orderly work in a hospital?

"I told you," Nick said sullenly.

"Yeah, but *armed* robbery. You're too slow for it."

"I had to," Nick said. "I got this girl in a jam. My uncle wouldn't help me. I'd stayed with the old buzzard since I was a kid about ten years old. I'd watched him opening his safe every day, and by golly when I was nuts last year for want of dough I suddenly remembered the combination."

"But why the gun?"

"It was my uncle's," Nick said. "He kept it under his pillow. Said he'd kill anyone who broke into his house. I got it for my own protection when he was out, not to use, but to keep him from using it on me."

"But then you went ahead and shot him!"

"What could I do?" Nick protested. "He caught me taking his strongbox out of the safe. I pulled his gun, without thinking. He ran. I shot. Only nicked him."

"Your own loving uncle!"

"Loving uncle, hell! I can't re-

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member ever not hating him. It was his brother got Mom in trouble and I was the result. My dad was a merchant seaman. I never set eyes on him. Uncle Al took care of me when I was ten because Mom was in the hospital. She had some insurance and he was counting on her dying. She obliged him. As my loving guardian he got my estate and then farmed me out to foster homes. So I was only after what was rightfully mine."

By now they had gone through woods where they buried their prison clothes. In a town they found two bicycles on a front lawn and rode off on them, traveling northward.

It was nearly dusk when they got into the hills. At the top of a grade, set back in the pines, stood a shack with boarded windows and No Trespass signs. Motorcycles were parked outside and there were beer cans strewn all around. A bearded man lay sprawled and snoring at the foot of a tree. Above him hung a leather jacket that had *Royal Bengals* and a tiger on the back. Beside the man lay a chain with one end in black tape. Sounds of revelry, male and female, accompanied by much splashing, came from beyond the undergrowth at the rear of the shack.

Lou got off his bicycle and crept to the house. It was empty. The bearded man opened his eyes, saw Nick, snatched the chain and jumped up, swinging. Grabbing a flat rock, Lou came up behind and smashed the Royal Bengal's skull.

"That's murder!" Nick spoke hoarsely. "You've made us murderers!"

"Shut up! He would have ripped you to pieces."

Lou inspected the motorcycles, selected two, and with Nick protesting, shoved the other machines into a ravine.

"Get on your hoss!" he ordered Nick.

Someone shouted from behind the brush. A man appeared, grotesque in shaggy hair. But Lou and Nick were already on the downgrade, the exhausts roaring. They passed through mountain villages and resort towns and must have traveled fifty or sixty miles when Nick let out a cry.

"It's them!"

From far behind came the faint roar of open mufflers. The dumped motorcycles must have landed on brush and had been easily recovered.

Those unwashed cats lived on wheels. Lou figured he could keep ahead of them for a half hour at the most. Then those chains that the Bengals wore like leis would whip at them, and the air would be heavy with the spray of blood.

"Think girls, boy!" Lou tried to quiet the whimperer. "Tomor-

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row night you'll be on a Brazilian tramp ship bound for loveland."

They were living on borrowed seconds when they reached a fork in the road where a branch led to the right over a bridge.

"Which way?" Lou asked.

"To the left," Nick said.

Lou swung to the right and stopped in the center of the bridge.

"That's not the way!" Nick cried in panic.

"It's the only way," Lou said. "Those schwinos will be on us in seconds! Quick!"

Lou lifted the motorcycle over the bridge rail and dropped it into the stream. The water was deep and the machine sank immediately. Nick clung to his cycle until Lou threatened to throw him over the rail with it. When the second cycle had disappeared, Lou pulled his accomplice back to the brush scarcely moments before their pursuers shot over a rise and paused at the fork.

Beams from headlights swept the dirt road. Listening to the obscenities, Nick got the shakes. If he let out even a squeak Lou would have to clunk him and take to the stream. By the time they'd finished beating up Nick he'd be a mile downriver and they'd never catch him.

That was all you could do—play it safe. These days everything was rough-tough. You made mistakes, like getting sent to Sontag; but you corrected them, and then kept a jump ahead of the mob that was out to bury you. Nick wasn't geared for that jump ahead. He wouldn't last the night.

Uncle Al's farm was six or seven miles farther on and the two were sweat-drenched when they reached it. Nick wished he were back in Sontag.

"No more Sontag," Lou reminded him. "It's either South America or the gas chamber."

Uncle Al lived down a lane between plum and apricot orchards in an unpainted frame house set among oaks and pines. It was early, but from an open bedroom window they heard the buzzsaw of Uncle Al's snoring.

"A pushover," Lou whispered.

From the toolshed he got two short pry-bars and handed one of them and the pencil flashlight to Nick.

"You're c-coming with me!" Nick stammered.

"I'm standing by Uncle Al's window," Lou said. "If he wakes up, I go after him. You're protected, boy!"

Nick gave a little time to that idea before he nodded.

The back door was no trouble and the safe was against the kitchen wall near the open door to Uncle Al's bedroom where the old man could see it from his bed.

A gun lay under Al's pillow,

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which made greater security unnecessary, since the whole countryside knew that Uncle Al would shoot at anything that moved. Nick was really taking a great risk, but his long-festering hatred suddenly made him equal to it.

At a kitchen window Lou watched Nick turn the pencil flash on the dial. When the safe was open and Nick was pulling out the metal strongbox, Lou rushed around to the open bedroom window and tossed a stone at Uncle Al. The old man came awake with a roar, grabbing the gun and blasting away in the direction of the safe before he was completely out of bed.

Lou climbed through the window and got to the raging old farmer at the bedroom door, cracking his skull with one swing of the pry-bar.

Nick and Uncle Al were dead.

When Lou left the farm he had almost $9000 in a brown-paper bag. The bloodied pry-bar was now in Nick's hand, and the strongbox, opened with a key from Al's trousers, was beside Nick, locked again, with a few hundred dollars still in it along with deeds, mortgages, stocks, bonds, and business papers. There was no blood on Lou and he felt sure he'd left no fingerprints. The second pry-bar, wiped clean, was back in the toolshed.

Walking west toward the coast, Lou passed through several small towns, reaching Mayford before the stores closed. At the Emporium he purchased a new outfit of sports clothes and swimming trunks which he put into a shopping bag printed with the company's name. Then he phoned the local police and described a young man who, he said, had held him up near the Emporium, taking his wallet, money, and papers. He had to get back to San Francisco, he explained, but would phone the Mayford police in a day or two. Lou gave his name as David Jarrett.

He did this to have an explanation for carrying no identification.

It was midnight before he saw the Pacific Ocean and he went to sleep on the beach.

In the morning, while he was getting a shave and haircut, the announcement of the double murder, and the killing of a Royal Bengal, came over the radio. He heard himself described as he lay back with his face wrapped in a hot towel. It was a sketchy description that fitted thousands of cleancut-looking college boys. What was really serious were the roadblocks the California Highway Patrol were setting up everywhere.

After a fine breakfast Lou returned to the beach, stripped to his trunks, swam, sunned himself, and got into conversation with a couple of tanned, sun-bleached kids named Hank and

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Ben who lived in Garden City, thirty miles north.

"You boys heading home soon?" Lou asked.

"Sure are," Hank said. "One more dip and I'll have to get my old road menace hacking and spitting. Got a date, and my girl's a foot-stamper if I'm late."

Yes, Hank would be happy to give Lou a lift. They all hit the surf. When they were dressed, even a prison psychiatrist would have had difficulty believing that one of the trio was a triple murderer.

A few miles north of the beach resort they ran into the first roadblock. Cars were held up for half a mile. Lou got out and watched the CHP men operate. They were polite and smiling as they gave the cars up front a quick go-ahead.

When it was their turn an amiable young patrolman sauntered over and asked for their ID's.

"This is painless," he said rather apologetically. "You fellows aren't what we're after. But we have to check everybody."

This was smooth. Under a stethoscope Lou's heart would have sounded like falling rock, but outwardly he merely seemed mildly curious. Garden City was fifty miles from San Francisco. By nightfall he'd be viewing harbor lights. He knew where he could get a forged passport and immediate passage on a foreign-flag rust-bucket to somewhere far from San Quentin's cyanide gas.

Hank and Ben produced their draft cards and drivers' licenses.

"How about you?" the officer said.

Lou shrugged. "Haven't any."

"No draft card?"

"Draft card?" Lou chuckled. "I'd hardly be carrying one. Just back from my hitch in Vietnam. Went to San Diego to see my folks, and I'm on my way to join my battalion in San Francisco."

"Then why no papers?"

"Holdup. Last night. I'd just bought some new clothes at the Emporium—" Lou pointed to the name on the shopping bag—"in Mayford. A kid followed me out of the store and pulled a gun on me. Just around the corner! About ten-fifteen steps from the main drag. Took my wallet. Laughed when I begged for my papers. I called the Mayford police, gave them the details—you can check with them. My name's Jarrett, David Jarrett."

"Oh. Sorry about that, Dave," the patrolman said. "Yes, the Mayford chief phoned us about the holdup. Doesn't seem to be any connection with the man we're after."

Lou maintained a look of mild curiosity. He wasn't going to trip himself by showing how relieved he was. Don't speak unless spoken to, answer only what you're asked,

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and you're in the clear. Under the soiled garments in the Emporium bag lay a glorious future: senoritas, night clubs, sunny South American beaches.

"What outfit you with, Dave?" the CHP man asked.

Ha! His inquisitor wasn't catching him there. Lou had read a week ago of an engineer battalion which had returned to San Francisco from overseas. He remembered its number.

"Twenty-fourth Engineers," he answered.

"Twenty-fourth, eh?" The officer nodded pleasantly. "What company, Dave?"

Ha-ha-ha! There it was again, the tiny subtlety, the slight little possibility of error that could put a man in the gas chamber. At Sontag Penitentiary Lou had read everything in the papers right down to the last obituary.

He recalled the news story of the GI in Vietnam who had gone AWOL and had been caught entertaining troops in a USO show. This GI had said he was in the engineers and when asked what company had replied, "Fourth."

That had nailed him. Army engineer units list their companies alphabetically.

So what company was Lou in? Hm. M. The Army loved the letter M. It had M-1's and M-2's, and wasn't there an M-16?

"M," Lou said.

That was all—M. He wasn't volunteering any extras. Just playing it safe.

"M?" the patrolman repeated casually.

He stepped away and conferred with a CHP lieutenant. Returning, he told Hank at the wheel to pull off the road.

Lou's heart began to race. Had something gone wrong? It had progressed so beautifully until now. That wad of nearly $9000 in the Emporium bag! It had been so fragrant. Now he could almost smell the almond flavor of cyanide as it would steam up around him in the San Quentin gas chamber.

What had gone wrong?

"Did you have to lie?" Hank demanded when he'd pulled off the highway.

"Lie?" Lou retorted. "What do you mean, lie?"

"I've got a date with my girl," Hank wailed. "By the time the police get through quizzing me and Ben and checking with our parents, my girl will be in a tantrum that'll put me in the doghouse for a month."

"What are you talking about—lie?" Lou demanded. "I didn't lie!"

"'I didn't lie!'" Hank mimicked him. "My brother's really in the engineers, buster! So you're in M Company, are you? And you didn't lie? Even though Army engineer companies don't go above four letters—A, B, C, and D!"

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A sophisticated story about an inconstant wife with definitely homicidal tendencies . . .

MR. BLOT AND MR. BLISTER

by FRANK SISK

THE LUNCHEON SPECIALTY AT the Commerce Club every Friday was crabmeat Mornay. Mortimer Lot, after a year of self-imposed exile, had almost forgotten its savory excellence. He was just finishing off the ramekin with a last swallow of dry sauterne when a painfully familiar voice said, "Why, hello there, Lot. When did you grow the beard?"

Mortimer Lot raised his eyes to survey the decidedly fatuous face of Felix Lister. "The beard has been under cultivation many months. Approximately eleven. How do you explain your own look of having been recently flayed?"

"I've been under certain tension."

"Delighted to hear it."

"I suppose I've had that coming. May I sit down a moment?"

"It plays havoc with punctilio." Lot daintily patted his gray-flecked mustache with a napkin hem. "Also, I'm expecting a phone call."

"I won't take long. Trust me."

"Trust you?" A hollow chortle. "That's rich, Lister, considering past performance."

"I realize I'm being somewhat irregular—"

"Your irregularities would fill a freight car."

"— but I simply must talk with someone who understands Constance."

"Who'd presume to understand Constance?" Lot inquired philosophically of the big chandelier.

"Well, you know. Her quirks. You were married to her for five years."

"Less two months, thanks to snake."

"May I sit down then?"

"Oh, hell, yes. Why not? And please order us cognac."

"Thanks." Lister summoned the waiter and eagerly ordered. "I don't know just where to begin," he said, shooting an uncertain glance across the table.

"That's a fine set of pouches

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under your eyes," Lot said amiably. "Insomnia or liver?"

"I don't sleep any too well lately."

"Can't be conscience at this late date."

"You haven't mellowed much, have you?"

"You should have crossed my path six months ago."

"I'm paying one hell of a price, if that's any satisfaction."

"None whatever. As a cuckold I'm not cool."

"Believe me, Mort, the shoe's on the other foot now. And, Lord, it pinches. Do you mind if I call you Mort?"

"I heard you used to call me Blot once," Lot said.

"Constance's name for you that we sort of, well, shared. At that time. I was a bit of a fool, looking back at it."

"You're still a bit of a fool," Lot said pleasantly.

"I deserve it, I deserve it."

"For the sake of the record, however, while you and my helpmate were engrossed in the Mr. Blot concept of me, I dubbed you Mr. Blister. Apt, certainly. Constance didn't approve then, but possibly now—"

"That's exactly what she's been calling me for the last few weeks."

"*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose,*" Lot intoned.

"I don't get it," Lister said.

The waiter came with globular snifters of cognac. Lot took from a leather case a long thin saffron-colored cigar and placed it between clamps of white teeth. He offered no cigar to Lister. Striking a bookmatch, he said, "Well, Felix, let's get to the point before the phone calls me."

"Constance is trying to kill me," Lister said.

"Don't jump to hasty conclusions, Felix. If she *really* wanted to kill you, take my word for it you'd be on the ice right now."

"Wait till you hear this, Mort. Yesterday, while I was sunbathing on the patio, a large pot of geraniums fell from the balcony outside our bedroom and crashed not more than a foot from my head. Constance was up there alone. If that pot had connected, it would have brained me kaput."

"A miss is as good as a mile."

"It's not an isolated incident, Mort. One day last week, on the cook's day off, Constance served me a glass of orange juice liberally laced with glass splinters. If there hadn't been an unusual amount of pulp and seeds, I might have downed the drink in a few gulps and perforated my guts for good."

"She's running true to form," Lot said.

"And another little matter: the bottle of aspirin I keep in my medicine *cabinet*, my own personal bottle of aspirin, now contains a dozen white tablets just a wee bit smaller than aspirin.

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What do you mean, true to form?"

"She's simply trying to tell you something, man. Just as she once got the message across to me, and to Simon Singleton."

"Simon Singleton. Her first husband?"

"Right. Or Simon Simpleton as we referred to him during the conjugal deadfall."

Lister shook his head gloomily.

"Si was an amateur archer of some note," Lot stated. "He was often pictured in the papers on the receiving end of a two-handled silverplated cup. Youngish but bald as an egg. Cavernous of cheek. Shy of eye. To the manor born but childlike in low company."

"Where is he now?"

"Spearing fish in the Bahamas, a genteel pursuit. But to return to chronological sequence, Si taught Constance how to use the bow and arrow. During their brief span of marital bliss she became extremely adept. Bull's-eye more often than not. Then one fine mer afternoon, as Si was extracting his own arrows from the target, a shaft whizzed past him so close that its feather scorched his right ear. His ears were frankly oversize, let's admit that. Constance was the careless archer. Two days later she was equally careless in the same dangerous way. Si thoughtfully stepped aside and allowed her to proceed with a divorce."

Lister sniffed the cognac, then swallowed the whole d o l l o p. "What makes her that way?" he asked plaintively.

"Austic mania, my o w n headhunter calls it."

"To me she's never seemed particularly artistic."

"Austic, man. A–U–T–I–S–T–I–C."

"Oh, that. What's it mean, Mort?"

"Wishful thinking. Her beliefs and desires are rooted in fantasy. The factual, the actual, hardly influence her life at all. This is expecially true where men are concerned. She is searching for an ideal and every once in a while she imagines she has found him."

"I'll buy that," Lister said firmly.

"You already have. And conversely, Constance s o m e h o w bought you, just as she once bought Si Singleton and yours truly. Her father died in a fall from a horse when she was seven."

"That's news."

"My headhunter l e n d s it significance. Though the o l d man's fatal fall was probably due to his abiding love of strong drink, C o n s t a n c e sees him subconsciously as a princeling or something of that sort. The standards are no less high for being false. She insists that her husband meet them. By the way, who's the current candidate?"

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"A hell of an unkempt young guy named Jock Roy. He can't be more than twenty-two or so, but he's got this awful damn beard."

"You prejudiced against beards, Felix?"

"It's not like yours, Mort. Yours is clean, even looks combed. But this kid, I mean it makes you itchy just to look at it."

"Occidentally speaking, cleanliness is next to godliness. The oriental ethos is often the opposite. Does this Jock Roy wear beads and carry a prayer wheel?"

"He wears a dirty turtleneck sweater and carries a red guitar. He sings these songs he makes up about how it really is in East Saint Louis with the bedbugs segregated from the cockroaches. I'm not kidding, Mort."

"Well, I'd say you've had it then."

"What should I do?"

"If you value your life you'll do what I did, what Si did. Withdraw courteously from the scene. Go into the wilderness and grow hair, or go underwater and spear fish."

"What if I don't like that route?"

"In my opinion, for what it's worth, your alternative is nonexistent. The deep-dyed autistic thinker, as the headhunter describes Constance, becomes definitely homicidal when opposed in one of her dream schemes. Like a rattler, she gives a warning and then strikes unerringly at the heedless. You've got your warning, Felix."

"Good Gawd!"

"A word to the wise . . ."

"Good Gawd!"

"Soothe your ego by thinking of Jock Roy as Jerkboy."

The waiter approached. "A phone call, Mr. Lot."

He walked to the steward's desk just outside the dining room and picked up the phone receiver lying on the blotter. "Yes?"

"That you, man?"

"Right, Jocko. Everything's A–OK."

"The cat found you then?"

"On schedule."

"I've earned the bread then?"

"You've earned the bread, Jocko. And I'm going to give you an extra slice if you write a farewell note."

"Like what, man?"

"In your own inimitable style, inform Blister's wife that Lister has paid you a large sum of money to disappear. Address the envelope and bring it to the Hyperion Bank and Trust in one hour. Say, three o'clock. I'll be waiting for you there with a certified check."

"You're a groove, man, a fur-bearing groove."

"I also have a one-way ticket for you to Mexico City."

"And I'm supposed to stay there for a month?"

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"That's it."

Lot cradled the receiver and started back to his table. Seen from halfway across the room, Lister's seamless face looked like a pink balloon inflated nearly to the bursting point. The eyes bulged apprehensively over the brown cushion of pouches. The unset mouth might have been sketched in maroon by a haphazard cartoonist. A nervous hand ran through the lank hair as Lot sat down.

"I'm going to take your advice, Mort," Lister said gravely. "It's a godsend I met you here."

"I've got enough time for another cognac," Lot said. "This one's on me."

"Homicidal," Lister murmured from the depths. "Well, I'll step aside."

He's uttered his own death warrant, Lot mused with satisfaction. To thwart Constance in her current drive was reckless; to thwart her while subsidizing the departure of her next dream scheme was bound to be fatal. Lot's plan guaranteed the *coup de grâce* to Lister.

The waiter brought new snifters.

Lister emerged sad-eyed from the depths. "I'm curious, Mort. What kind of warning did she give you?"

"She applied a fine coat of poison to one side of my razor. The slightest nick and presto!—lights out." Lot raised the snifter to the middle terrain of his beard. He knew he was seeing Mr. Blister for the last time. He was pretty sure he was also blotting out (Mr. Blot at work) the memory-nagging nuisance of in-Constance. He said over the snifter, "Let's drink to Jerkboy."

Smiling wanly, Lister did so. Smiling widely, Lot drank to his own stage managership.

NEXT MONTH ...

detective short novel — complete

don't miss

LESLIE FORD's — *The Supreme Court Murder*

(see page 114 for further details)

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a MIKE SHAYNE detective story by

BRETT HALLIDAY

Too many years have passed (more than a dozen!) since we brought you a Mike Shayne story. Here is one, in short-short length, that is virtually unknown, and it has the fillip of asking you to keep pace with the redheaded ratiocinator. Better still, it asks if you can solve the murder before Mike does. So—be your own detective in this case of a frantic husband who appeals to Mike Shayne to find his missing wife . . .

MURDER IN MIAMI

by BRETT HALLIDAY

MICHAEL SHAYNE WAS DRINKing his first early-morning cup of black coffee liberally laced with Five-Star cognac when an impatient knock sounded on the door of his apartment overlooking Biscayne Bay.

The redheaded detective got up with a frown of annoyance, crossed the room with the hem of a shabby bathrobe flapping about his bare legs, and pulled the door open.

Two men stood in the hallway. The one in the lead was about thirty, with a thin haggard face and dark circles under his eyes. He was incongruously dressed for that hour in a rumpled tuxedo and a black bow tie that was slightly askew. He spoke nervously.

"Mr. Shayne? My name is Rowan—Charles Rowan. My wife has d i s a p p e a r e d and I thought . . . that is, Herbert suggested . . ."

He paused uncertainly, turning for confirmation to the younger man who lounged across the threshold behind him.

"I'm Herbert Melzner." He wore a polo shirt and slacks, and there was a hint of mockery on the smooth tanned face and in the light blue eyes. "Grace—Mrs. Rowan, that is—is my sister, and when Charles got himself in a

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dither about her not coming home last night I suggested we come to you."

Shayne stood aside and waved a big hand toward chairs across the room. "Sit down. Herbert Melzner?" he repeated reflectively, touseling his bristly red hair as he pulled the door shut behind his visitors. "The name sounds familiar." He grinned sudden recollections. "Aren't you the lad who's notorious in the scandal columns for throwing away your money on fast women and slow horses?"

"Never mind my brother-in-law, Mr. Shayne," said Charles Rowan impatiently, seating himself on the edge of a deep chair. "I want you to find my wife and persuade her to come home."

"Where do you think she's gone?" Shayne crossed to his own chair and lifted the steaming cup of coffee royal to his lips.

"I . . . don't know." Rowan's hesitation was hardly perceptible. "I sat up waiting for her all night and became so worried by six o'clock that I telephoned Herbert to find out if he had seen her."

"You might have known she wouldn't come to me," Melzner said drily.

"Why not?" demanded Shayne.

The younger man shrugged. "Grace and I don't get along very well. Just a couple of weeks ago—"

"You and she are always quarreling," Rowan broke in. "But I had to talk to someone."

"Where was your wife last night?" asked Shayne.

"I didn't even know she intended to go out until I returned late from a banquet and the housekeeper told me that Grace had left the house earlier without saying where she was going or when she would return. I kept expecting her every moment, but when daylight came I felt I had to do something."

"You'd better tell Shayne the truth if you expect him to accomplish anything," said Melzner coldly. "My sister is a bit of a fool," he went on to the detective. "She's been carrying on an affair for weeks with a young gigolo named Ted Dinker."

"I've warned her he's nothing but a fortune hunter," muttered Rowan.

Melzner laughed derisively. "What a shock he's going to get if he has eloped with her when he discovers all her money is tied up in a trust fund with mine."

"Let me get this straight," said Shayne. "You suspect your wife may have eloped with a man named Ted Dinker?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Grace is always making a fool of herself over younger men," put in Herbert Melzner. "If she were my wife I'd have put my foot down long ago."

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"She's impulsive," Rowan said slowly. "But I can't believe she would . . . Mr. Shayne, there must be no publicity, but I want you to find Grace at once. No matter what she has done."

"How do you know she hasn't returned already?" Shayne looked at his watch. "How long is it since you left your house?"

"An hour," Rowan hazarded, glancing at his brother-in-law for confirmation. "Herbert came at once when I phoned him, and picked me up in his car. We've been driving around aimlessly ever since . . . trying to decide what was best."

Melzner nodded. "It must have been just six thirty when I picked you up on the sidewalk in front of your place. I noticed the newsboy cutting across your lawn to deliver the morning paper, and he invariably reaches my house two blocks farther down, at six forty."

"It's seven thirty now," Shayne said. "Suppose your wife did return after you left the house, Rowan—could she get in?"

"Of course. She has her own key to the front door. Do you think I should have waited longer?"

Shayne shrugged and said, "I simply think we should check up before starting a search for her." He got up and went to the wall telephone. "Anyone at your place to answer the phone in case your wife has returned and is asleep?"

"Mrs. Jensen. The housekeeper. She'll be coming down about this time to prepare breakfast."

"Does she know your wife is missing?"

"She knows nothing about it. She retired to her third-floor room immediately after I came in last night, and I presume she thinks we are both still in bed—as we customarily would be at this hour."

Shayne nodded. "I'll try not to alarm her unnecessarily. What is your telephone number?"

He lifted the receiver and repeated the number to the switchboard operator. He waited a moment, and then said, "Mrs. Jenson? I'm calling for Mr. Rowan and—"

He stopped abruptly and his visitors could hear excited words crackling in the receiver. Shayne's face tightened as he said peremptorily, "I understand, Mrs. Jenson. Listen carefully. This *is* the police. Don't touch anything until we get there. Nothing at all."

He broke the connection and gave another number before turning to meet Charles Rowan's frightened and inquiring gaze.

Shayne's gaunt face was seamed and his gray eyes were bleak, but his voice was curiously gentle as he said, "Your wife *has* returned, Rowan. Mrs. Jenson just came downstairs and stumbled over her

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body in the hallway. She's been murdered."

Charles Rowan had half risen. At Shayne's blunt words his face went flaccid and he sank back, covering his face with both hands.

"Murdered?" Melzner leaped forward to grab Shayne's arm, but the detective shook him off, barking into the mouthpiece, "Get me Chief Gentry." Over his shoulder Shayne said curtly, "Strangled to death. Give me the dope on Ted Dinker—quick."

Turning back to the phone, he said, "Will? Mike Shayne. Mrs. Charles Rowan has been murdered at—" He looked inquiringly at Melzner and repeated the street address as the young man gave it.

"Strangled in her own house within the last hour, according to my information," he continued to the Chief of Police of Miami. "She stayed out all night, presumably with a man named Ted Dinker, whom you'd better locate at once."

He paused again while Melzner swiftly gave him a description of Dinker and the name of his downtown hotel. Relaying this information to Chief Gentry, Shayne added, "Bring Dinker out to the death scene right away. I'll meet you there with the victim's husband and brother and we'll try to add things up."

He hung up and turned to face his two stricken visitors, saying harshly, "I know it's tough, Rowan. But we can't do anything for your wife now except get the man who strangled her. Pull yourself together and help me."

Rowan gulped back his tears and exclaimed, "It must have been that man—Ted Dinker. They must have returned soon after I drove away with Herbert and he forced his way in when she unlocked the front door. Perhaps she had told him she had no large amount of ready cash and he strangled her in frustrated rage."

"Perhaps," agreed Shayne. But it might have been a servant or a prowler who entered after you left the house and was surprised by her when she returned."

"Impossible. Mrs. Jenson is the only servant who sleeps in, and she's quite elderly and feeble. All the windows have burglar alarms, and the rear and side doors were securely bolted on the inside. No, Mr. Shayne. She must have allowed that man to enter with her, and he . . ." His voice trailed off into sobbing grief.

Shayne turned to Melzner who had crossed the room and was helping himself to whiskey from a decanter. "You spoke of a joint trust fund, Melzner. The police are going to want to know who inherits her share."

"Why, I suppose I will. That is, it's fixed so the entire fund

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goes to the survivor. Why will the police want to know about that?"

"What did you quarrel with your sister about?"

"Money," said Melzner sulkily. "We could touch only the income from the trust fund, and Grace never spent her share. Charles didn't allow her to. But would she give me any when I needed cash? Not a red cent." His voice was aggrieved as he tossed off a shot glass of whiskey.

"Now you'll have her income also," said Shayne thoughtfully.

"What of it?" Melzner's face was ugly. "Do you think . . .?"

"Can you prove your sister didn't come to your house last night?"

Charles Rowan started up from his chair and exclaimed, "You can't possibly suspect Herbert, Mr. Shayne—even though he is heavily in debt and was always quarrelling with Grace."

He paused, biting his underlip worriedly as though a new thought had come to him, then went on doggedly, "You can't possibly suspect him. I can give him a perfect alibi. You see, we've been together every instant since he picked me up in front of my house, and it must have happened *after* that because Grace wasn't even home at that time."

Shayne shrugged and said, "I just like to get everything straight. I'll dress and we'll get out there to see what Dinker has to say for himself."

The Rowan residence was an imposing three-story stucco house set well back in an expanse of green lawn on a quiet, palm-shaded street. The front door was an elaborate affair of scrolled metal and plate glass, and a neatly folded newspaper was propped up against it. A police car drew up at the curb immediately behind Shayne as he parked, and Chief Will Gentry got out of the back-seat with a pallid-faced and frightened young man who was securely handcuffed to the wrist of a uniformed policeman.

"That's Dinker," Charles Rowan exclaimed when he saw the prisoner. He started forward angrily but Shayne shouldered him back and asked the Chief of Police, "What does he say about this, Will?"

Chief Gentry was a stolid man. He pushed the wide brim of a Panama back from his florid face and said, "My men picked him up just as he was driving into the hotel garage. But he claims to have a perfect alibi for the last couple of hours. We haven't checked yet, but he *says* he's been drinking coffee in a place where he's known since dropping Mrs. Rowan here at five thirty."

"That's an absolute lie." Rowan surged forward against Shayne's long arm. "I sat up until

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six thirty waiting for her and she hadn't returned by then. You admit you were with my wife last night. You must have murdered her."

Ted Dinker shrank back from the angry husband and admitted defensively, "We did go for a boat ride on the bay. Nothing wrong in that. Had engine trouble or we'd have been back by midnight. I don't know what this is all about," he went on nervously. "I sat right here in my car at five thirty and watched her go in the front door and she was okay then."

"The man is lying, of course," said Herbert Melzner to Shayne and Gentry. "It's perfectly obvious that he hung around here until he saw Charles drive away with me at six thirty. Then he slipped inside with her and strangled her in the hallway."

"It's perfectly obvious that someone is lying," Shayne agreed grimly. "Let's go in and see what we can find out."

The six men went up the walk together, and Michael Shayne stopped abruptly when they were ten feet from the closed front door.

He pointed a big forefinger and said with satisfaction, "Now we know which one of you is lying. He's your murderer, Will."

CHALLENGE TO THE READER: *Who killed Mrs. Rowan? The author has given you all the facts . . . but if you didn't keep pace with Mike Shayne, you will find the solution on page 161.*

NEXT MONTH ...

12 detective and crime short stories

10 *NEW* — including

NEDRA TYRE's *A Nice Place to Stay*

MICHAEL HARRISON's *Wit's End*

JAMES REACH's *A Time To Remember*

EDWARD D. HOCH's *The Spy and the Bermuda Cipher*

(see page 108 for further details)

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a NEW detective SHORT NOVEL by

JAMES POWELL

How in the world can we describe this short novel? How can some of the stories written by James Powell or Robert McNear or Avram Davidson or Gerald Kersh be described? Words sometimes fail.

We can say that you have never read anything quite like this newest tale by James Powell—and that would be true. It's an utterly original "original." Perhaps it is not a story to everybody's taste; but if it is to your taste, you are in for a treat, for one of the most delightful and chuckling reading experiences you have ever had.

If we must pick a word, "unique" is the only one to describe this strange short novel of realistic fantasy and fantastic realism. Now meet Ambrose Ganelon IV, the fourth in the line of heads of San Sebastiano's celebrated detective agency. Hardened, inveterate criminals avoided the Agence Ganelon—they knew better than to challenge the greatest detective family in the history of gumshoeing. Now read why . . .

COINS IN THE FRASCATI FOUNTAIN

by JAMES POWELL

THE AGENCE GANELON, San Sebastiano's celebrated detective agency, operated on the old vaudeville maxim: never follow one banjo act with another banjo act.

Ambrose Ganelon I, who founded the agency in 1840 when the tiny principality reigned as the Riviera's most fashionable watering place, had been a detective of the armchair school. In fez and carpet slippers he would sit making oboe reeds while the rich, the humble, and the perplexed Inspectors of Police filed by. They told their tangled stories and departed, comforted by soulful

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notes from the detective's oboe. Those wood-sounds fell sweetly on the ears of law-abiding citizens, but they set the Underworld's teeth on edge. Criminals shunned the rue Blondin whenever Ganelon was solving a case.

Ambrose Ganelon II, who took over the agency in 1881, had been a pioneer in the field of scientific investigation. He was the author of classic works on pathology and criminal psychology, along with a number of handbooks of a more practical nature: *A Policeman's Guide to Human Hair,* for example, and *Footprints and What They Tell Us.* But there was a hidden side to his life. Among the family's most treasured possessions was a letter of commendation from Prince Rene written in invisible ink. Yes, Ganelon had been the mysterious "G," founding head of the Slyboots, as San Sebastiano's feared and respected Intelligence Service is still popularly known.

In 1922 Ambrose Ganelon III brought a new style to the agency, combining the mental powers of his predecessors with a rough-and-tumble approach to detection. He and his two-fisted operatives interviewed clients while wearing fedoras on the backs of their heads and stretching their feet on the desks. Bottles of Scotch and voluptuous blonde secretaries were standard office equipment. Outside of business hours, however, Ambrose Ganelon III neither spoke out of the side of his mouth nor leered at beautiful women. He was, in fact, a gentle, sober husband, preoccupied with bringing up his son in all the traditions of the Genelon family.

How proud he had been when little Ambrose, at the age of three, had interrupted his reading aloud from Great-grandfather's memoirs (the chapter entitled *My Most Baffling Case*) and identified the fat old sailor as the mad strangler ten paragraphs before Great-grandfather revealed the solution. How proud again when at the age most children were just learning to read, little Ambrose had stood at his Grandfather's knee and broken the Italian naval code.

Watching the boy grow to manhood, Ambrose Ganelon III realized that he had sired the greatest sleuth of his line, perhaps in the history of detection. There was only one question in his mind. "My dear boy," he once wrote to his son who was away adding to San Sebastiano's Olympic gold medals, "Your Great-grandfather worked from an armchair, your Grandfather from a laboratory. I, as you know, belong to the two-fisted school. You will be the greatest detective of us all. But of what style, I wonder?"

Beyond the harbor entrance the luxury yacht La Pomodora rode at anchor, huge and immaculately

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white. Ambrose Ganelon, the fourth of that name, sat in the approaching motor launch with his right leg crossed carefully over his left. On leaving his office, Ganelon had discovered pink flesh peeking through his threadbare left knee. There had only been enough time to ink in a dark blue spot on his kneecap. Ambrose Ganelon IV had a style of his own: he was the first of his family to be a detective of the impoverished school.

Even in his father's day the agency had experienced a marked decline in business. "I am happy to report that this year, as last, we have not had a major case," wrote the two-fisted detective that summer to his vacationing son touring the Underworlds of London, Paris, and Amsterdam disguised as a brass-knuckles salesman. "After three generations I think the Agence Ganelon has taught the criminal to shun our beloved principality."

But it wasn't until his father's tragic death that Ganelon IV came to understand the real meaning of these words. Interrupting his study of Mafia involvement in the opium trade, he flew home to take over the agency, leaving the Hong Kong police with irrefutable proof that behind the plastic surgery Mao Tse Tung was actually a Sicilian named "Peaches" Carboni.

For the next few years Ganelon watched the family money melt away as he struggled to keep the agency's door open. He reduced his staff, then reduced it again. At last he moved quietly from the sumptuous first-floor quarters to a cramped little one-desk office and shabby bed-sitting room under the eaves. But at least the bronze plaque with the name *Agence Ganelon* remained on the building on the rue Blondin. Ganelon knew that if that plaque ever disappeared, the master criminals of the world would descend on the prosperous little principality in force.

Apollo Apollinaris, a chubby little man in dark glasses and a yachting cap heavy with gold braid, was waiting at the top of the gangway. "Welcome aboard La Pomodora, Monsieur Ganelon," he said with unconcealed awe. "The best I dared hope for was one of your top operatives."

"In matters involving our leading citizen I prefer to handle matters myself," said Ganelon. Apollinaris owned half of San Sebastiano, including the Casino. But that was only a small part of his vast financial empire. Apollinaris-Arabian Petroleum, for example, shipped oil on Apollinaris Line tankers built from plate supplied by Apollinaris Steel using ore from Apollinaris Mines in Labrador.

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As he led Ganelon the considerable distance to the afterdeck, the multimillionaire said, "Your dynamic father once saved me from slow arsenic poisoning at the hands of my wife of the moment, a beautiful woman with a passion for Spanish chauffeurs. Your father's death saddened me. Most unfortunate."

One day at the agency, Ganelon's father had stepped in to break up a fist fight at the water cooler. (Several years of inactivity had frayed the tempers of his hard-hitting staff.) Suddenly, operatives were pouring out of their cubicles, all aching for a good melee. They fought each other until exhausted and, bloody and grinning, got to their feet, smoothed the dents out of their fedoras, and discovered Ganelon's father at the bottom of the pile, dead of a broken neck.

"May I present Miss Billie Baxter and Miss Mitzi Latour of my secretarial staff?" said Apollinaris, when they reached the afterdeck. Two bikinied sunbathers wriggled their bodies in a languid greeting. "And over there is the notorious Jo Jo Mouton of Marseilles," said the multimillionaire.

Leaning back with his elbows on the rail was a burly, red-faced man in a homburg and dark glasses. In spite of the heat he wore a camel's-hair overcoat which almost hid the bulge of a pistol. Ganelon guessed it was a Hunsecker-Bowles DeLuxe which came with a barrel extension, silencer, telescopic sights, and a holster that doubled as a shoulder stock. "Jo Jo is with the Strongarm Corporation," explained Apollinaris.

Ganelon frowned. The Strongarmers described themselves as international trouble-shooters in the areas of industrial security, labor relations, and lobbying. In other words, they provided their clients with good old-fashioned protection, gangs of strike breakers, and a mercenary army to overthrow uncooperative governments. Whatever business the Strongarm Corporation had with Apollinaris, its presence in San Sebastiano was an affront to the Ganelon escutcheon.

The multimillionaire sat the detective down at a canopied table and called for drinks. "Ah, have you injured your arm?" he asked with a solicitous frown.

"It's nothing, I assure you," said Ganelon who had twisted his arm slightly to hide the frayed sleeve.

"Only a flesh wound, eh?" said Apollinaris. "Ah, how I envy the exciting life you lead! Crime, violence, the world of deep passions!"

"It all becomes quite humdrum," said Ganelon, more interested in the cigarette that Apollinaris was about to offer him

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from a jewel-studded gold case. For reasons of economy the detective hadn't had a cigarette for two days.

Apollinaris stopped in the act and snapped the cigarette case shut. "No," he insisted. "This is the humdrum life." He made a gesture with the cigarette case that took in the yacht and perhaps even included Miss Billie and Miss Mitzi. "A multimillionaire, Monsieur Ganelon, is a man who no longer has dreams, because whatever he wants he can have. Paradoxically, he is condemned to live out the dreams of others. At this very moment we are riding at anchor on one of the dreams of any number of ambitious young men. In many ways it is more their dream than mine. For when the sea rises and falls they don't get seasick. They may dream of dining on fine food from plates of platinum, but I'm the one who gets the indigestion."

Apollinaris leaned forward with the open cigarette case. "Does that sound like self-pity?" he asked. Before Ganelon could take a cigarette, Apollinaris snapped the case shut as if to punish himself. "Yes, I suppose it does," he sighed. "But you know, Monsieur Ganelon, I wasn't always as rich as Croesus. I have known hunger and deprivation. At seventeen I was making a meager living as a tourist guide. Then came the fateful day! I found myself guide to a dour old Scot who felt he wasn't getting his money's worth unless I could answer questions about every building or statue we passed. I was not, I might add, above inventing stories just to satisfy him.

"We had just visited our colorful old market where you can buy those delightfully embroidered pincushions in the shape of our patron saint and were proceeding to the Herpetological Museum by way of the Place Frascati. Now in those days the fountain was quite neglected and overgrown with moss. Apart from some vague legends connecting the fountain with death, I knew nothing about it.

"Undaunted, I told my inquisitive Scot that according to legend, if you made a wish and threw a coin in the fountain, your wish would come true. To my astonishment he unsnapped his leather change-purse and threw in a coin. Such are the effects of legends on a man from a country full of ghosties and ghoulies and things that go bump in the night.

"I tried the story out on other tourists. Invariably it evoked a coin. By going back later to collect the money I was soon able to lease the fountain from the puzzled city fathers for a small annual fee.

"With the lease in my pocket and some small financial backing from the adjoining cafés I had

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postcards made, picturing 'San Sebastiano's Famous Wishing Fountain' and describing the legend. These I gave away free to the postcard vendors. By the next season I was able to commission a hungry song writer to set the legend to music. An arrangement of *One Coin in the Fountain* for mandolin and accordion became quite popular. And so the story spread and the fountain began to be included in the guide books.

"Not long after, a lady novelist wrote a best seller about a poor American governess who throws a coin in the famous Frascati Fountain and then marries her employer, a dissolute Italian count who, under her saving influence, turns to writing wholesome tracts for the edification of the working class. The movie version, by the way, starred Mary Pickford.

"I could go on and on. Today, as you know, thousands of tourists come each year to throw their coins in the fountain. If they wonder about it at all, I suppose they think the coins go to some worthy charity. In actual fact, the coins go to me. Or at least they did. Monsieur Ganelon, someone is stealing from the Frascati Fountain! I am losing as much as three hundred francs a day."

Ganelon had hoped for a case worthy of his scintillating powers of deduction. The disappointment showed on his face.

"Perhaps the baffling nature of the crime will intrigue you," said Apollinaris. "After all, how can the coins be stolen? A policeman guards them from eight in the morning until twelve thirty at night. Each evening the fountain is floodlit. And since I noticed the shortage, I, Apollo Apollinaris, the multimillionaire, put on hip boots and personally clean out the fountain with a broom each night at twelve fifteen. You see, those coins are especially precious to me because the fountain was the first step to my fabulous fortune."

"How can you be so sure you are being robbed?" asked Ganelon, stifling a yawn.

"My accountants have worked out an interesting corelation between the number of tourists who visit San Sebastiano and the amount of money that will be thrown into the fountain," said Apollinaris. "Within a franc or two it's amazingly accurate." The multimillionaire's face brightened. "How about this?" he said, hoping to kindle the detective's interest. "The shortages began two months ago, the same day the body of an unidentified man was found floating in the fountain."

"Cause of death?" asked Ganelon crisply.

Apollinaris looked crestfallen. "Pneumonia," he admitted. "And a month before that it was an unidentified woman, dead of a

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liver condition." He shook his head sadly. "The police found no evidence of foul play in either case."

Apollinaris leaned forward confidentially. "I'll come clean, Monsieur Ganelon," he said. "I have another reason for wanting you to take this case. For some time now, the Strongarm Corporation has been pressing me to let them represent my interests here and abroad in matters such as this. In fact, they have been quite insistent."

Apollinaris glanced over at Jo Jo Mouton who was staring up at a pure white gull hanging in the air above the yacht. Apollinaris smiled slyly. "I hit upon a very clever way to stop all their pestering," he said. "I told them that I would contract for their services on one condition: that they can end the mysterious thefts of coins from the Frascati Fountain before the Agence Ganelon can." Apollinaris struggled to swallow a laugh. "And they fell for it," he giggled. "Please accept the challenge, Monsieur Ganelon, and rid me of these larcenous leeches."

Ganelon knew of the Strongarm Corporation's unpleasant habit of devouring those who employed it. Once it got its teeth into Apollinaris, it would pick him clean. Suddenly, more was at stake than a few coins in a fountain or even the Apollinaris multimillions. San Sebastiano could not be allowed to fall into the hands of the Strongarm Corporation. "You have convinced me," said Ganelon.

"Good," said Apollinaris. "Just between the two of us, I find Strongarm's methods a bit—" A pistol shot rang out and a white, feathered bundle fell to the deck. Mouton scratched his nose and returned the Hunsecker-Bowles to its holster. "—a bit sudden," Apollinaris finished.

Former Inspector Hector Jouvet spent his retirement at the Café de l'Esperance, always sitting, melancholy and erect, at the same sidewalk table. He rose respectfully and wiped his mouth with a napkin as Ganelon stepped from the little green car. The old police inspector revered the Ganelon family, particularly Great-grandfather Ganelon, in whose honor Jouvet had once taken up the oboe. But an ultimatum from his landlady had cut short his musical studies. Jouvet was now modestly proud that his idol's Great-grandson had called him for information.

"My dear Monsieur Ganelon," he said, "won't you join me? The tripe is delicious."

Ganelon declined, preferring to conserve what little operating capital he had. "About the bodies in the fountain," he asked.

"As for the woman," said

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Jouvet, taking up his knife and fork again, "the information is a bit thin. Estimated age: sixty-five to seventy; cause of death: chronic liver condition. Clothes worn but well kept. No identification papers. The body was buried in Poitier's Field. As for the man—" Jouvet stopped. "I believe we are being observed."

A bull-necked man with a broken nose, a narrow forehead, and a scowl was sitting two tables away. Like Mouton, he wore a homburg and a camel's-hair coat.

Ganelon nodded. The man had followed him in a black limousine.

"Do you think he can read lips?" asked Jouvet.

"I'd be surprised if he can read anything," said Ganelon. "And now about the body of the man."

"I think I can be a little more help to you there," said Jouvet. "As you may know, I give a weekly workshop on identification methods at the Police Academy. As luck would have it, I used that very body as a classroom project.

"Here's what we had to go on. Estimated age: seventy to seventy-five; cause of death: pneumonia. Clothes worn but well kept. Shoes cheap but recently resoled. No identification papers. Well developed torso and heavily callused hands. A curious ring of light calluses in the socket of the right eye. Bronze filings under the fingernails.

"I gave the shoes to my cadets and sent them off. Here we were quite fortunate. A shoemaker in the rue Scribe not only identified the repair work as his own, but knew the dead man by name. In fact, they had been in the baby-shoe bronzing business together for several years. Customers would leave the baby shoes with the shoemaker and then the dead man—he called himself Dupont but spoke with a marked German accent—would pick them up and return them bronzed. A vanishing craft in our time. In all San Sebastiano I know of only one other place—a little watch-repair shop near the Bourse—that bronzes baby shoes."

"To get back to Dupont," said Ganelon, a bit impatiently.

"Apparently this Dupont was something of an eccentric," continued Jouvet. "Hard of hearing, short-spoken, and preoccupied with his own thoughts which were of a rather moralistic nature. If the shoemaker asked him how things were going, for example, Dupont would shake his head and mutter, 'War is wrong' or 'Sloth doesn't work.' Or sometimes he'd smile and say, 'Temperance is good' or 'Justice has been done.'

"This evidence of strong religious convictions may, I believe, explain how Dupont's body came to be in the fountain. That very morning, when the shoemaker arrived at seven thirty

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to open his shop, he expected to find Dupont waiting for him, as he always was except when the weather was bad. 'My Fair-Weather Friend' was the shoemaker's nickname for Dupont. Instead, he found a parcel of bronzed baby shoes on his doorstep. I think we can assume that Dupont, feeling death approach in the night, felt compelled in conscience to leave his sickbed and make his final delivery. Perhaps he stopped on his way home to drink of the fountain's life-giving waters, died, and fell into the pool."

Jouvet looked pleased with himself as he pushed his empty plate aside. Ganelon tensed. But instead of pulling out his cigarettes the old sleuth ordered a slice of Camembert. "But who was this Dupont and where did he come from?" Jouvet went on. "I believe I can answer these questions in a manner not unworthy of your Great-grandfather himself.

"Dupont was actually a Prussian nobleman—note the accent and the callus marks around the eye, the marks of a monocle. For generations his family had served the Fatherland in the artillery—note that Dupont was hard of hearing, an occupational hazard of that branch of the military. Following the ancient practice, the family supplied their own cannon, a bronze heirloom, more a symbol of their readiness to serve than anything else.

"Then, during the First World War, this Dupont, this Baron von Whatever-his-name-was, sees the flower of Europe's manhood destroyed in the carnage of the trenches. Revolted by war, he gives up his titles and estates and experiences a religious conversion à la Tolstoy. Meditating on the evils of war, pondering the other great moral issues of our time, he wanders from country to country dragging the family cannon behind him. For he has made a vow: he will not rest until he has melted down that instrument of war and death into symbols of life and hope—into bronzed baby shoes to inspire proud parents with joyful memories." Jouvet stopped, his voice thick with emotion.

The silence roused Ganelon from his thoughts. "You mentioned a watch-repair shop that bronzed baby shoes," he said. "Are you free to undertake a small assignment for the agency?"

Back at the rue Blondin, Ganelon parked in front of the drug store and waved gratefully to Georges, the pharmacist, who had volunteered his little green car when the business of inking in the kneecap had put Ganelon behind schedule. The driver of the Strongarm limousine, which had followed him doggedly from

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the café, scowled thoughtfully.

Under the eaves again, the detective dined on his last two eggs (hard-boiled), searched unsuccessfully through his wardrobe of disguises for a stray cigarette, and spent the rest of the evening poring over his files on Apollinaris and the Strongarm Corporation. Ganelon didn't feel particularly challenged by Strongarm's Board of Directors: Allister Fong, Hans Brunner, and Blacky S. F. X. Ryan, though each had their reasons for hating San Sebastiano and the Ganelon family. But he didn't underestimate Strongarm's Chairman of the Board, Count Myshkin, the frail, white-haired old man who had already matched wits with two generations of Ganelons.

In 1906 Myshkin, then a young officer in the Czar's Intelligence Service, had attempted to realize Russia's centuries-old dream, a naval base on the Mediterranean. From the bowels of the pocket battleship Vladivostok, then on a courtesy visit to San Sebastiano, two Cossack regiments, horses and all, were to spill out and occupy the defenseless principality—defenseless because the wily Myshkin had secretly underwritten an American tour for the San Sebastiano Opera Company, featuring its celebrated production of *Aïda* in which the principality's entire army appeared as spear carriers.

Only Grandfather Ganelon and the Slyboots stood in the way. They knew that Myshkin was in San Sebastiano posing as the recreation officer of the Vladivostok. But they did not know why. Or why the battleship was taking on such large quantities of oats—65.3 times more than was needed for the Russian sailors' kasha. Then the Slyboots' Russian Room, which monitored the Czar's troop deployment on a large pin-filled map, reported the disappearance of two Cossack regiments. Putting the oats and the Cossack horses together, Grandfather Ganelon suddenly realized the audacity of the Russian scheme.

Fortunately, Myshkin's timetable was delayed by a three-day run of luck at the Casino. When, at the insistence of his Cossack companions, he cashed in his chips and left, his carriage was followed by another. At that time of night the Central Post Office Building was empty except for Pierre Boulanger, the ancient telephone operator. Boulanger had guaranteed himself a job for life by removing all identification from the jacks and holes of the switchboard, the nerve center of San Sebastiano's communications with the outside world. With Boulanger dead, Myshkin would signal the attack with a flare gun.

Grandfather Ganelon and his Slyboots dashed upstairs to find

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Boulanger mortally wounded on the floor. (From his hospital bed he was later to blackmail San Sebastiano into giving him a State funeral before he would teach a successor how to run the switchboard.) The Cossacks turned and snarled, but they were no match for the Slyboots. In desperation Myshkin tried to fire the flare gun through the window but missed. As the room exploded into phosphorescence he jumped from the window into the Cornichon, the principality's gentle little river, and vanished beneath the surface, dragged down by the weight of his Casino winnings. Or so it was thought. As for the Vladivostok, she waited two more days for a signal that never came. Finally the Cossacks mutinied and forced the captain to put out to sea so that they would be home for Russian Christmas.

In later years Myshkin popped up again, always the mastermind behind some devilish plan, always a worthy and menacing adversary. And of late there were stories that he was the secret kingpin of Soviet espionage in the West.

What if San Sebastiano should now fall into Communist hands? Could the free world afford to lose the tiny principality which a gracious American Secretary of State had once described as "that most precious jewel in the diadem of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization"?

At 11:30 Ganelon set off to witness the collecting of coins from the fountain. Across the street, Georges, the pharmacist, was about to drive off in his little green car. He waved to Ganelon and stepped on the starter. The car exploded, vanishing in a cloud of thick smoke. Georges staggered from the wreckage in tatters and started kicking furiously at what was left of the right front tire. "It isn't supposed to do that!" he shouted indignantly.

Ganelon hurried on his way, followed by the bull-necked Strongarm man on foot. The great detective knew the bomb had been meant for him. Apparently the Strongarm Corporation was prepared to kill to win its race with the Agence Ganelon.

Ganelon led his heavy-footed pursuer down one narrow street after another as he revolved the case in his mind. What did he have so far? Two bodies in the fountain. Was the first connected with the second? Was the second—Dupont's—connected with the thefts? Or was it only coincidence that his body was found there on the very day that the shortages began? And who was Dupont?

Ganelon shook his head. Poor Jouvet. Ganelon's Great-grandfather always liked to compare an armchair detective with a landscape painter. The genius of both, he insisted, resided in

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the seat of the pants. Both must know *where* to sit. Strange words from a man who seldom left his armchair. But of course in his own case he meant taking up the correct position before an interior landscape of supplied information.

Jouvet had set up his easel so close to the calluses in the dead man's eye socket that they gave his picture a very Prussian cast, complete with antique cannon, war in the trenches, and an earnest vow.

Stepping back a bit, the landscape became less coherent and considerably less romantic. Dupont was an old baby-shoe bronzer with a stock of commonplace aphorisms. ("Sloth doesn't work," though undoubtedly true, was hardly profound.) And Dupont's build and callused hands—which Jouvet insisted were the result of dragging around a bronze cannon—certainly evidenced a more strenuous profession than baby-shoe bronzing. Perhaps Jouvet's visit to the watch-repair shop would shed more light on Dupont.

Ganelon walked on until, from behind him, he heard the unmistakeable sound of a silencer being fitted onto the barrel of a Hunsecker-Bowles. Turning the next corner quickly, Ganelon ducked into a courtyard doorway. The bull-necked pursuer, Bruno, hurried by, heading straight into San Sebastiano's Armenian quarter, the home of rug merchants like the notorious Leon Barbarian who sat in front of his shop until all hours, begging each passer-by to come in and rob him blind because his wife needed a brain operation. This remark never failed to infuriate Mrs. Barbarian who would burst out of the shop, wild-eyed and incoherent with rage. Barbarian would give a sad little shrug, his point made.

Ganelon retraced his steps in the direction of the Place Frascati.

The Frascati Fountain occupied one side of the cobbled square. Cafés lined the other three. Under the watchful eye of a policeman in summer whites, Ganelon joined the small knot of tourists in front of the floodlit pool.

At the end of the Eighteenth Century the wealthy Frascati family had torn down the simple stones of the original fountain which dated from Phoenician times and commissioned an itinerant fountain sculptor and clockmaker named Mathias Swartzwald to construct a monument worthy of the family name. The theme of the sculptured figures was "The Wedding of Neptune and the Cornichon." The Sea God and a matronly woman representing the River Goddess were the central figures and of heroic size. Beneath their clasped hands water cascaded down from a grotto into the fountain's oval pool. At Neptune's back were a

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dozen man-sized demigods of the sea mounted on plunging dolphins, seahorses, and ponderous terrapins. The River Goddess was attended by nereids carrying distaffs, butter churns, stalks of wheat, and other objects representing the various activities of San Sebastiano.

Behind the statuary rose an eighty-foot clock tower. Below the clock face were two doors through which, as Swartzwald described his conception to the Frascatis, was to appear the most dazzling display of mechanical figures ever designed by man. As the clock struck four, for example, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, done in life-size, would emerge from the right-hand door and, making appropriate gestures, ride slowly across to the door on the left. At seven o'clock the Seven Deadly Sins would appear. At nine, the Nine Muses. And so on. At high noon, in addition to the Twelve Apostles there would be a mechanical re-enactment of the Battle of the Cornichon when the army of San Sebastiano led by Guido Frascati threw back the Moors under Akbar the Cruel.

Swartzwald labored for years. Finally, San Sebastiano gathered in the square to witness the wonderful display of mechanical figures. The clock struck high noon. The right-hand door opened but instead of the Twelve Apostles and the Battle of the Cornichon, the figure of a shepherdess appeared, complete with crook, and crossed slowly to the other door. Surely that couldn't be all. The crowd waited. Even when the sky clouded over no one left the square.

At the stroke of one the door opened again and the figure of a man in a slicker and nor'wester appeared. As he did, rain began to fall. Every hour on the hour from that day forward, the shepherdess appeared if the weather was fair, the man in the slicker if it was foul.

Of course this was much less than the Frascatis had paid for and they tried to lay hands on Swartzwald. But he was nowhere to be found. The most popular version of what happened was that Swartzwald had squandered much of the Frascati money speculating in copper and tin, then fled the city with his family to avoid prosecution . . .

Ganelon turned as Mouton and five other men in homburgs and camel's-hair coats emerged from a limousine with much slamming of doors. Mouton lined his men up in front of the fountain. He busied himself adjusting a hat here and a tie there until they were all replicas of himself in various sizes.

At 12:15 a second limousine arrived. The policeman saluted smartly as Apollinaris stepped out, in the company of Miss Billie

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and Miss Mitzi. "Ah, Monsieur Ganelon, have I kept you waiting? Am I late?" said Apollinaris as he opened the trunk compartment of the limousine. Sitting down on the rear bumper, he pulled on a pair of hip boots and added thoughtfully, "Though perhaps I should be late more often."

"Why do you say that?" asked Ganelon.

"It's an odd thing," said Apollinaris. "A few weeks ago I fell asleep at a testimonial dinner given in my honor by the Friends of the San Sebastiano Zoo. The speeches were particularly long and boring. People tend to go overboard when they want you to give them an elephant. In any event, that night I didn't get here until twelve forty-five."

"You mean the policeman had gone off duty and the coins had been left unguarded?" asked Ganelon.

Apollinaris nodded. "But oddly enough, that was the only time in the past two months that there wasn't a shortage." Ganelon's expression prompted him to add, "Do you find that interesting?"

"Perhaps," said the detective cautiously.

"Well, here we go," said Apollinaris, taking a long-handled broom and stepping into the pool. First he worked across the back of the fountain, carefully overlapping each push of the broom as he waded forward into the water. Then he waded around to the front of the pool and pulled with the broom, raking the coins into the shallow water. There they were scooped into a wire basket and emptied into canvas bags.

Meanwhile, the bull-necked Strongarm man had come into the square carrying a bright red and yellow carpet over his shoulder. "I got it for a song, Jo Jo," he said proudly. "The old geezer's wife needed a brain operation."

"I told you to give You-know-who the business, Bruno," snarled Mouton with a glance in Ganelon's direction. Bruno hung his head and joined the circle of glowering Strongarm men who were placing canvas bags filled with coins in the trunk compartment of the multi-millionaire's limousine. When the trunk was locked, two of the Strongarm men got up on the rear bumper. Ganelon and Mouton joined Apollinaris and his party in the limousine. Bruno and the rest of the Strongarm men pulled up behind in their car.

At 12:30 the floodlights on the fountain went out and the policeman headed homeward. A moment later the caravan of cars set off for the Banque Apollinaris.

"Here is something I forgot to mention, Monsieur Ganelon," said Apollinaris. "Tomorrow in Chicago the Strongarm board meeting will be turned into an

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early-morning Think Tank devoted to our mysterious thefts of coins, with all the directors spitballing ideas back and forth and generally gray-celling the whole shenanigan. They will have Jo Jo's reports, photographs of the fountain from every angle, and even a scale replica of the Place Frascati. And of course Jo Jo will be in touch with them by phone. I might add that Strongarm's Mr. Fong called me this morning regarding the grille I installed over the outlet pipe in the pool so coins wouldn't be washed into the sewer. He—"

"Hey!" protested Mouton.

"No, Jo Jo, fair is fair," said Apollinaris. "Your Mr. Fong jumped the gun a bit, starting to spitball before Monsieur Ganelon had agreed to accept the case. The grille is six feet square, made of half-inch bars covered with a substantial mesh and bolted to the floor of the pool. Since the outlet pipe is only two feet in diameter, Mr. Fong wanted to know why the grille was so large. I explained that the pool drops off sharply as it approaches the outlet pipe. The larger grille makes it more convenient for sweeping out. Unless I miss my guess, Mr. Fong thinks our thief is getting at the coins from the sewer system."

They arrived at the Banque Apollinaris where two armed guards with an escort of Strongarm men carried the money directly to the counting room. The others waited in the limousine.

"Of course Fong's mind would run to sewers," thought Ganelon. Fong's Grandfather, the infamous Dr. Ludwig Fong, Eurasian arch-criminal and would-be world dictator, had once attempted to blow the crowned heads of Europe to smithereens as they gathered in San Sebastiano for the coronation of Prince Adalbert II. Becoming curious during one of his solitary walks about the abundance of water rats in the flag-decked streets, Great-grandfather Ganelon had entered the city's sewer system where, after a lengthy search, he located Fong just about to set a match to the fuse of an immense explosive charge while the *Coronation March* thundered down from the mighty cathedral organ overhead.

The warped genius led the detective on a wild chase through the strange, dank world of subterranean waterways and dripping passages. Cornered at last, Fong had grappled with the aging detective on a ledge above the main sewage canal. Both had lost their footing, fallen, and been carried out to sea by the rushing water. An ironic way for an armchair detective to meet his end.

A guard approached the limousine and handed Apollinaris a piece of paper. The mul-

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timillionaire read it and spread his hands. "We are short nearly three hundred francs," he said.

Ganelon declined Apollinaris' offer of a ride home, choosing to walk in order to collect his thoughts. But he had hardly gone half a block when he heard the heavy-footed Bruno behind him. The detective turned off onto the Boulevard Tancredi whose street life and crowded cafés would frustrate Bruno's evil designs for the moment and give Ganelon time to speculate.

Ganelon was interested by the fact that the fountain had not been robbed the one evening Apollinaris arrived late. Somehow, by arriving at 12:45 instead of 12:15, Apollinaris had frustrated the thief. Therefore the thefts must take place after 12:15—between the time Apollinaris collected the money and the time he delivered it to the bank. For if the thefts took place earlier, then the money would be missing whether Apollinaris arrived late or on time. That was logic speaking—the voice of Ganelon's Great-grandfather.

Unfortunately, Ganelon had just witnessed the collecting and the delivery to the bank. The money was not being stolen after 12:15—the evidence of his senses told him that. Amid the flammarion flasks and retorts of his laboratory (where he frequently mixed up batches of rum nougat for his grandson), Ganelon's Grandfather always insisted that logic by itself was like a bear in a zoo. Unable to roam the forests and streams of real objects and sense experience, cut off from the bee trees of technology and the berry bushes of statistics (Grandfather had a sweet tooth), logic lost its vigor and played tricks to please the crowd.

Ganelon's ancestors kept arguing inside his head. As for himself, the detective decided to sleep on the case. Crossing the Cornichon by the Pont des Oreilles, he entered the Dureville section, the dark, narrow streets of San Sebastiano's criminal quarter. Behind him, Bruno's footsteps quickened and once again came the sound of the silencer being fitted on the Hunsecker-Bowles. Ganelon smiled and turned down the rue Crevecoeur.

Here, as for centuries, a Lady of the Evening stood in each doorway. As Ganelon passed by, each made him an offer in a businesslike but not unpleasant manner. The detective politely declined them all. The annals of San Sebastiano are filled with tales of the generosity and heroism of its Ladies of the Evening. Ganelon's own father—who, under the code name "Casanova," had led the Nightshirts, the principality's dreaded Resistance fighters during

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the Second World War—had much praise for the ingenuity with which the brave Ladies of the Evening hid downed Allied flyers from the Gestapo. Neatness and matronly decorum characterized the Ladies of the Evening; in return they expected to be treated with civility.

Ganelon heard indignant voices behind him. Apparently Bruno had made a coarse reply to one of the Ladies of the Evening. Angry women were crowding around the Strongarm man. Someone was calling for soap to wash out his mouth. Ganelon paused at the end of the street to let the beleaguered Bruno see where he was going. Then he entered a dimly lit Underworld hangout, the Café Noir.

The patrons knew him well. Legerdemain, the pickpocket, dropped his drink. Tartine, the petty forger, quickly sneaked the cap back on his fountain pen. Big Charlot, the mugger, tried to look inconspicuous. The rest cursed the detective and his family under their breath, while secretly dreaming of some day pulling off a job big enough to merit a Ganelon's attention.

A large, nattily dressed burglar with pomaded hair blocked Ganelon's path. Babar the Elegant. Babar looked hopefully at the detective and then glanced down at the end of a diamond bracelet hanging, as if by accident, from his breast pocket. Ganelon knew the bracelet well. Ten badly cut, flawed stones in a mediocre setting, it was the property of a lonely spinster who paid burglars to steal it because she found Inspectors of Police charming. Ganelon smiled, shook his head, and passed by.

"Ah, Maurice, my friend," said Ganelon, addressing the proprietor in a loud voice, "I've come to ask you a favor. Scotland Yard informs me that Mad Dog Watkins has escaped from Wormwood Scrubs again and is headed our way in a stolen homburg and camel's-hair coat. He's perfectly harmless. Old Mad Dog hasn't gone berserk or run amuck in years. Still, Scotland Yard would like to have him back. So keep your eyes peeled, eh?"

Maurice grunted noncommittally. Ganelon waved and walked on through to the back door. He had scarcely closed it behind him when he heard the uproar of voices, the overturning of tables and breaking of bottles which meant that Bruno had burst into the café still frothing at the mouth from his encounter with the Ladies of the Evening.

Ganelon awoke early the next morning. He stuffed his cheeks with cotton batting and put on a white cap and jacket and a black eye-patch. A few minutes before 8:00 he was trundling an

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ice-cream cart into the Place Frascati. The day was warm and the sky blue. Ideal ice-cream weather. Still, he had misgivings. Along with the vanilla and chocolate, he had been talked into buying three cartons of fudge-and-date ripple. "An American flavor sensation that's sweeping the Riviera," the wholesaler had insisted.

Two men approached the fountain from different directions. One was a policeman who took up position beside the pool and leaned on his saber. The other, a fair-haired young man with a mustache, stopped directly in front of the fountain and looked up at the clock. At that moment the clock struck eight. As pigeons circled the square, the figure of the shepherdess emerged from one door and glided mechanically across to the other. "Fair weather," thought Ganelon gratefully, as he watched the young man walk away.

A few old men drifted into the square to sun themselves on the benches or play calanque, San Sebastiano's national game based on which of three regulation-size crumbs of bread would be eaten first by the pigeons. Next came the souvenir vendors and the street urchins with big eyes and shoeshine kits. By 8:30 the tourists had started to arrive to throw in their coins and make their wishes.

"Ice cream!" shouted Ganelon as Mouton and his grim-faced men burst out of the Strongarm limousine. All were equipped with small walkie-talkies. Mouton stationed two men in the cafés to the right and left of the fountain and two others, wearing binocular cases, in a fourth-floor window of the Hotel de la Fontaine. Mouton himself, accompanied by Bruno who wore a noticeable bruise under one eye and a swollen lip, took a table in a café directly across from the fountain.

At 8:59 the young man with the mustache entered the square again. As before he looked up at the clock until it struck and then walked briskly back the way he had come. Not long after, the first of the tour buses marked "San Sebastiano By Day" pulled up to the fountain. Ganelon watched as the passengers were herded over to the pool where they threw in their coins and were then quickly herded back into the bus.

Meanwhile, Mouton had entered the phone booth in the middle of the square. Ganelon pushed his cart over to the door where Bruno stood guard. "Ice cream?" asked the great detective pleasantly. Scowling, Bruno pushed Ganelon aside and reached down into the cart. He rummaged through the cartons and pulled out an ice-cream bar.

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"That's fudge-and-date ripple, sir," said Ganelon meekly. "A popular new flavor."

Bruno eyed him suspiciously and bit into the ice cream. He cursed, spat, and grabbing Ganelon by the throat, reached for his Hunsecker-Bowles.

"Bruno!" snapped Mouton, sticking his head out of the phone booth. "Myshkin's still in the sack. But the Think Tank's starting to spitball anyway. Fong says check out that outlet pipe to the sewer. Maybe somebody's getting at the money that way."

So Myshkin had overslept. "Sloth doesn't work, my dear Count," thought Ganelon, recalling one of Dupont's aphorisms. Then Bruno, who was still holding him by the throat, gave the detective a shake and threw him to the ground. Muttering to himself, the Strongarm man stuffed his pockets with chocolate ice-cream bars and hurried away.

Ganelon got to his feet. His frightened look was just part of his disguise. As a youth Ganelon had spent a year at a Carthusian hermitage mastering the *via felix* the Happy Way, that almost-forgotten art of medieval self-defense based on redistributing an opponent's body humors (blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile) to produce an instantaneous change in temperament. With a hip lift and a deft twist of the wrist Ganelon could change a homicidal maniac into a simpering milquetoast or the most civil and obliging of men. His teacher, the venerable Father Sylvanus, had made him swear to use this terrible power only in the cause of justice.

More buses arrived, and more tourists appeared on foot and in cars. "Ice cream!" shouted Ganelon as coins flashed through the air and into the water. He was beginning to understand what a gold mine the fountain was for Apollinaris. But he was no closer to solving the riddle of how the money was being stolen.

The policeman, for example, bored as he looked, always had one eye cocked for the tourist whose hand might stray into the fountain, or for the aging pensioner hoping to eke out his allotment with a wad of chewing gum on the end of his walking stick, or for the bright young urchin taking advantage of the new steel coinage to rob the fountain with a magnet on a string. Nevertheless, Ganelon decided to investigate.

The policeman accepted the vanilla bar as his due. "This must be interesting work," said Ganelon.

"Dull as dishwater," said the policeman.

"But I'll bet you get a bit of excitement now and then," said Ganelon. Perhaps the thief was

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staging diversions—fake car accidents, fist fights, runaway horses.

"Dead as a graveyard," said the policeman, turning to pose for two lady schoolteachers with cameras. At that moment the young man with the mustache arrived at the fountain again. The clock struck ten.

"A regular visitor, that young man," said Ganelon.

"Tourists," said the policeman bitterly. "We pose for their snapshots. We give them directions. But laugh at their stupid jokes?" He shook his head. "That's where I draw the line."

Ganelon made a sympathetic noise.

"Listen," said the policeman, "I'm here on night duty and it's raining and it's dark. Suddenly that nut with the mustache pops up out of nowhere with a string of the oldest jokes on God's green earth. Why did the chicken cross the road? Just to be polite I laugh. Next thing I know he's coming back every night, same time, same tired jokes."

The policeman had finished his ice-cream bar. Ganelon offered him another. This could be the diversion the detective was postulating. "Did all this start about two months ago?" he asked.

"More like three," said the policeman, stripping the wrapper from the ice-cream bar. "Back when we had all that rain. Funny thing, this guy only made with the jokes if it was raining. Two months ago, when that dry spell hit us, he stopped. Now he shows up on the hour, but no more jokes."

The policeman bit into the ice cream. It was fudge-and-date ripple. He grimaced and demanded to see Ganelon's peddler's license. Fortunately the policeman was distracted by the first of the sleek tour buses marked "See the Riviera in Twelve Hours" which dashed into the square, paused long enough for its passengers to rain coins into the fountain from the windows, and then dashed off again.

Ganelon pushed his cart over to the telephone. Time to call Jouvet. As he arrived at the booth, Mouton stepped out and snapped fresh orders from the Think Tank into his walkie-talkie. Apparently Blackie S. F. X. Ryan suspected that the street urchins were a gang of midgets in disguise.

Ganelon smiled. Only Blackie S. F. X. Ryan would think of counterfeit urchins. Ryan had once forged and antiqued a document deeding San Sebastiano in perpetuity to one of his ancestors, an Irish court jester, as a reward from the Emperor Charlemagne for having introduced the pratfall into France. His masterful forgery had defied the experts. Today Ryan would be sitting on the throne of San Sebastiano if Ganelon's father had not detected

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one flaw: following the medieval practice, Ryan had dried the Emperor's crude signature by sprinkling it with sand—a fine, gritty sand familiar to all hot-dog lovers and indigenous to only one place in the world, the beach at Coney Island.

Ganelon also learned that Myshkin, refusing to spitball on an empty stomach, had stopped for breakfast on his way to the Think Tank. The Chairman of the Board was a notorious trencherman. "Gluttony doesn't work either, my dear Count," thought Ganelon as he dialed the Café de l'Esperance.

"Ah, Monsieur Ganelon," said Jouvet sheepishly, "from some celestial archair your Great-grandfather is laughing up his sleeve at simple old Jouvet and his Prussian baron."

"You visited the watch-repair shop then?" asked Ganelon.

"Yes," said Jouvet. "Apparently, bronzing baby shoes was only Dupont's sideline. Our Dupont was also an expert freelance watch-repair man. According to the owner of the shop, he could fix anything that told time. Give him a leaning hourglass or a burned-out electric clock and he'd bring it back to tiptop working order. The owner also remarked that recently Dupont had been driving himself hard and muttering 'Sloth doesn't work' under his breath all the time. He also developed a bad case of Watch Repairman's Eye—calluses in the eye socket from using a jeweler's loupe."

Ganelon grunted. Were Dupont's hands those of a watch-repair man?

"One more thing," said Jouvet. "The morning Dupont's body was found, a young man came into the shop, put a parcel on the counter and left without saying a word. The parcel contained all the watches and baby shoes Dupont was supposed to have delivered that morning."

"If this young man had fair hair and a mustache," said Ganelon, "I will have further need of your services."

Back at the fountain the street urchins were turning ugly, misjudging the intentions of the men in homburgs and camel's-hair coats who were patting their cheeks to check for the stubble of a beard. One Strongarm man had retired to the sidelines with well-kicked shins. A second was being followed around by a band of shoeshine boys.

Just before eleven Jouvet arrived at the fountain. The young man with the mustache made his appearance at 10:59. This time Ganelon examined him more closely. An altogether undistinguished chin, eyeglasses in steel frames, a sturdy green suit with wide cuffs. Why did he visit the fountain on the hour? What was

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his connection with Dupont? And what about the business of the jokes? When the young man left the square again, Jouvet followed at a discreet distance.

There was a mild commotion and turning of heads as Bruno crossed the square in the direction of Mouton. The wind shifted and from some distance away Ganelon could tell that the Strongarm man had been investigating the sewer. So could Mouton. He waved Bruno back. They conversed through the walkie-talkies. Bruno was shaking his head. He had found out the hard way what Ganelon already knew: the outlet pipe from the fountain narrowed to an impassable one-foot diameter before it reached the sewer. Ever since Great-grandfather Ganelon perished in its main canal, a detailed knowledge of the sewer system had become a part of every Ganelon's training, should he in turn ever have to chase a villain beneath the city streets.

At 11:59 the young man returned. Jouvet was not far behind. A sergeant relieved the policeman for lunch. The Strongarm men downed plates of cold cuts and bottles of beer and scowled at the fountain. Ganelon chewed listelessly on a fudge-and-date ripple and shouted his wares.

For the rest of the afternoon tourists poured into the square, the young man made his on-the-hour, every-hour appearances with Jouvet on his heels, and new orders arrived regularly from Chicago. Eaves-dropping by the phone booth, Ganelon was pleased to learn that Myshkin had stormed out of the Think Tank in a rage because they had started without him. As Chairman of the Board he claimed the right to throw out the first spitball. "You shouldn't lose your temper, my dear Count," thought Ganelon. "Anger doesn't work either."

A little before 3:00 a dark shadow fell across the square. Ganelon looked up, half expecting to find the immense head of one of the Strongarm men peering down over the rooftops to examine the fountain as if it was the scale replica on the Think Tank table. Instead, a shelf of dark clouds had appeared low in the sky. As the clock struck the hour the figure of the shepherdess appeared to announce fair weather under a darkening sky.

The clouds moved closer and the wind turned cold. By 4:00 Ganelon had to admit that fudge-and-date ripple had been a complete failure. Once, earlier in the afternoon, an American had shouted to his wife, "Hey, Madge, they've got fudge-and-date ripple!" The delighted tourists had eaten two apiece while visions of Saginaw, Michigan, danced over their heads. But the local people distrusted fudge-and-date ripple.

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The French tourists laughed at it in scorn. The Germans shook their heads gravely: fudge-and-date ripple had tried to sweep Baden Baden the season before.

"Ice cream!" shouted Ganelon as a crowd of angry old men chased a Strongarm man out of the square. When they tottered back, Ganelon approached their leader, a distinguished gentleman wearing the green rosette of a Master of the Pigeons. Each square in San Sebastiano had a Master of the Pigeons, who is the final arbiter in games of calanque.

"Trouble, sir?" asked Ganelon.

The old man was breathing heavily from the chase. "Why, that scoundrel kicked his way through three games of calanque," he said indignantly. "The pigeons will be upset for hours." Suspecting that possibly the thief had trained cormorants to dive for coins and disguised them as pigeons, Chicago had ordered the birds checked out. The idea was Hans Brunner's. Ganelon found it unworthy of the man who had once used a specially designed denture to bite the stones out of ladies' rings as he kissed their hands. So equipped, Brunner had pillaged San Sebastiano's social functions until Ganelon's father, waiting at the end of a bejeweled reception line, had apprehended him, his cheeks stuffed with diamonds and emeralds.

The detective looked up at the sky. "The games were going to be rained out anyway," he said, adding, not without bitterness, "in spite of your celebrated weather figures."

The Master of the Pigeons arched an eyebrow at this slight on the Place Frascati. "Ah, my dear Rosenkranz," he said, speaking to a russet-colored pigeon at his feet, "this gentleman mocks our weather figures. Remind him that up until a few weeks ago they had given us two hundred years of faithful service."

Ganelon's pulse quickened. "By 'a few weeks' would you mean two months perhaps?"

The old man smiled. "This gentleman connects the breakdown of the weather figures with that body in the fountain, my dear Rosenkranz. Does that mean he believes our local legend that Mathias Swartzwald, the dishonest clockmaker, was cursed to wander the earth, returning every seventy years to drown himself in despair at the scene of his crime? But you and I know the facts. The weather figures broke down one month ago, not two. Liberation Day, to be exact."

In 1944 the Nightshirts had taken to the streets and driven out the Germans. Liberation Day commemorated that event.

"If you will recall, my dear Rosenkranz," said the old man, "after weeks of not a cloud in

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the sky a sudden thunderstorm canceled the parade to the Tomb of the Unknown Nightshirt. As I hurried home across the square the clock struck and there was the shepherdess out in the downpour. Since that historic day one month ago, only the shepherdess appears, rain or shine." The pigeon strutted away and the old man followed him.

Light rain was beginning to fall as Jouvet followed the young man into the square and, as previously instructed, gave up the surveillance. Without penetrating Ganelon's disguise, he bought a fudge-and-date ripple bar—it would later appear on his expense account—and stood watching the fountain. Ganelon quickly pushed his cart out of the square. The ice-cream strategy had been a fiasco.

Fifteen minutes later, Ganelon had changed into his blue suit and was seated beside Jouvet in a café near the fountain.

"I've kept the square under surveillance," said Jouvet. "Nothing odd to report." He grimaced. "Unless you count an ice-cream bar I bought. It quite upset my stomach."

"What about the young man?" asked Ganelon quickly.

"The subject," said Jouvet, "is a bird lover. Except for his hourly visits to the fountain and time out for lunch, he spent every minute in our Museum of Natural History examining the bird displays. He had lunch at Chez Viviani, a small Italian restaurant on the rue Babette. I also dined there, so as not to attract attention. Mussels and canneloni. Delicious." Jouvet smacked his lips. "Only ten francs, wine and gratuity included," he added quickly.

"Quite reasonable," said Ganelon gruffly.

"Money well spent," insisted Jouvet, "for I struck up a conversation with the waiter. It seems that the young man is Swiss and has been taking lunch there for the past three months. The waiter regards him as a bit of a tragic figure. At first he appeared several evenings a week in the company of a pretty girl. The waiter called her the Girl in the Yellow Raincoat, because she always wore one. After about a month they must have had a lovers' tiff because the girl stopped coming with him. Now the young man returns one evening a week, but he is always alone."

"Thursday evenings?" asked Ganelon.

Jouvet nodded in amazement and assumed the eager expression of a little boy about to be taught a magic trick.

Ganelon sighed. "You say he is a bird lover," he said. "Yet each trip to and from the museum and the fountain he passed our zoo with its excellent aviary. Ob-

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viously he is a lover of stuffed birds. This was confirmed when you mentioned Chez Viviani. As you know, many of our cafés are official meeting places for coin collectors, chamber-music lovers, Doberman pinscher breeders, et cetera. On Thursday nights the Royal Taxidermy Society of San Sebastiano meets at Chez Viviani."

"A brilliant deduction!" said Jouvet, pulling out his cigarettes. Ganelon tensed. But the old man absently put them away again. "They would only taste of—what did the scoundrel call it?—fudge-and-date ripple," he said. "Yes, a brilliant deduction. But as much as I admire your Great-grandfather, perhaps my temperament is more suited to the scientific approach. I fail to see, for example, what stuffed birds have to do with the case."

"Probably nothing at all," said Ganelon. The great detective closed his eyes and for several moments was lost in thought. "Listen," he said at last. "Three months ago the body of a woman was found in the fountain. More or less simultaneously the Swiss arrived on the scene, plaguing the night policeman with jokes and visiting Chez Viviani with a girl.

"Two months ago Dupont's body was found in the fountain and the thefts began. At more or less the same time the girl disappeared and the Swiss gave up telling jokes in the rain and began to visit the fountain on the hour.

"Then one month ago the weather figures broke down."

"What do they have to do with it?" asked Jouvet.

Ganelon shook his head. "But I know that somehow the weather is involved," he said.

"Something along the lines of your Grandfather's fine study into the influence of the lunar cycle on Underworld activity?" asked Jouvet, referring to the book written by Ambrose Ganelon II—*The Tides of Crime* (London: Stoat and Sons, 1921).

"Not quite," said Ganelon. "In any event I have another assignment for you."

"I hope it involves test tubes and microscopes," said Inspector Jouvet. "I think I've been bitten by the scientific bug."

Back in his apartment Ganelon was tempted to change into his derelict's disguise and go stand in the soupline operated by the monks of the Abbey of the Holy Vernicle. Instead, he stacked his money into little steel piles. Of the 25 francs invested in ice cream, only 17 remained. But enough for one more venture into the world of commerce.

Not long after, he was back at the fountain with a new pushcart that sizzled in the light rain. From behind a fake black beard Ganelon shouted, "Hot

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chestnuts!" at the few people hurrying homeward across the deserted square.

The rain persisted. Buses marked "San Sebastiano By Night" pulled up within throwing distance of the fountain. Dry and cosy, the tourists weren't in the market for hot chestnuts. Even the young Swiss failed to appear. But then it was Thursday, get-together night for the Royal Taxidermy Society.

Ganelon cursed the weather and, as the clock struck the hour, he cursed the figure of the shepherdess as well. At least some of the pieces would fall into place if the weather figures had broken down two months ago instead of one. But he had no reason to doubt the Master of the Pigeons' story.

Bruno and another Strongarm man approached the fountain, grumbling over new orders from the Think Tank. Muttering against the rain, they scanned the seagods and nereids. Maybe the thief had painted himself gray and blended in with the statuary.

They also let drop that Myshkin had been coaxed back to the spitballing session. But first he was going to take two fashion model friends to lunch. "Why does the old geezer strut around with young dollies on his arm?" wondered Bruno out loud.

"Pride, my dear fellow," thought Ganelon. Sloth, Guttony Anger, and now Pride. Myshkin was well into the Seven Deadly Sins for so early in the day, Chicago time.

For the next hour Ganelon stood in the cold rain and pondered. How was the money being stolen? So far, his day in front of the fountain hadn't supplied the answer. And he didn't expect much more from what little time remained.

The secret had to be hidden somewhere in that night when Apollinaris arrived late. If he collects the money at 12:15, he is robbed; if he collects it at 12:45, he is not. Now, what happens in that extra half hour? The policeman leaves and the floodlights are turned off. The fountain is dark and unguarded. Ideal for a thief. But nothing is stolen. Why? Couldn't the thief operate while the policeman was there? Why not?

As if on cue, the night policeman approached to warm his hands over the coals and help himself to a handful of hot chestnuts. Ganelon smiled ingratiatingly and thought on. But he could discover no way that the presence of the policeman—the man's appetite for chestnuts was insatiable!—would *favor* the thief.

All right then, was there some reason why the thief couldn't work in the dark? Why would he need light? To see the coins? To see his way?

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"Hey, Madge, I can't find the ice-cream guy. How about hot chestnuts?" Ganelon looked up. The American couple from Saginaw, Michigan, had braved the rain for more fudge-and-date ripple. As Madge shook her head, the clock struck and the floodlights came on, illuminating the figure of the shepherdess as it glided out into the rain.

"Fair weather," laughed the husband. "You just can't depend on this foreign stuff, Madge. This morning it called the shot and now it's on the fritz."

Ganelon stroked his false beard thoughtfully. The American assumed that the weather figures had just broken down. Why? Because this morning the shepherdess has been correct. But even a broken watch is correct twice a day.

The Master of the Pigeons said the weather figures broke down a month ago, on Liberation Day. Why? Because on that day the shepherdess had appeared in the rain for the first time. But that particular rainstorm had ended a month-long dry spell. So, in fact, the breakdown could have occurred two months ago. It just wouldn't have come to anyone's attention until the first rain. Good!—that gave him some answers (bizarre as they were), including why a watch-repair man had callused hands. Think big, Ambrose IV.

Just then a long, red hook-and-ladder pulled into the square and up to the fountain. Misses Billie and Mitzi were in the cab beside the driver. Perched high on the rear steering seat was Apollinaris, wearing the full-dress uniform of an Honorary Grand Fire Marshal, complete with plumed helmet, epaulettes, bottle-green tunic, and silver-voiced trumpet. Mouton hurried over.

"I thought I'd stop by on my way to the Fireman's Ball," said Apollinaris, without leaving his seat.

"Anybody tries for the money and it'll be the last thing they try for," said Mouton, tapping his Hunsecker-Bowles.

Apollinaris cleared his throat. "Jo Jo, mightn't there be some question as to the legality of such drastic measures, considering the small amount of money involved?"

"Strongarm likes to keep it nice and legal," laughed Mouton, handing the multimillionaire a piece of paper.

Apollinaris studied the paper. "As I understand it," he said, "this is a permit to exterminate pigeons at the Frascati Fountain."

"It's a license to kill," said Mouton. "If the thief tries anything, we start exterminating."

As Mouton returned to his post, Apollinaris looked around the square expectantly. Then, with a disappointed shrug, he was about

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to signal his driver to proceed, when he sniffed. Looking down, Apollinaris discovered Ganelon. "Ah," smiled the multimillionaire, "the simple pleasure of hot chestnuts!"

The agency's reputation demanded that it show itself. "Mr. Apollinaris," whispered the detective, "I'm Agence Ganelon Operative Number Twenty-five. Please pretend we are haggling over the price."

"I knew you people would be around here somewhere," beamed Apollinaris. "What a clever disguise! Anything to report?"

"We know *who,*" said Ganelon. "*How* still remains a mystery."

"But not for long, I'll bet," smiled Apollinaris. He sniffed again. "Hot chestnuts. What an old-fashioned treat for everyone at the Fireman's Ball! Give me all you have."

Ganelon hastily scooped the chestnuts into paper cornets, adding up the cost as he went. Thirty francs. Burdened down with the many little packages, Apollinaris found he couldn't reach his wallet. He winked. "Just put this on my bill," he said, as the hook-and-ladder pulled away.

Ganelon pushed his cart into a dark alley. Like the ice cream, hot chestnuts had been another disaster. Fortunately he had a spare disguise—dark glasses with a false nose attached, a white cane, and a soft, peaked cap. Ganelon tapped his way across the square and sat down beside the telephone booth. Spreading out his few remaining coins in the upturned cap, he drew a carpenter's saw and a violin bow from under his coat. *Red Sails in the Sunset* (scored for the musical saw by Ganelon himself) filled the almost deserted square.

Thus employed, Ganelon turned his mind once more to the question of why darkness foiled the thief. Why did he need light? Ganelon looked at the fountain. The floodlights had brought the statuary out of the shadows and turned the cascade to gold. But they also made the surface of the water shine. Enough to hide the presence of the thief beneath the water? Could that be the answer to the riddle?

At that moment a tour bus rumbled into the square. As the hail of coins from its windows broke the surface of the pool, Ganelon detected taller spurts of water. The Strongarm guns above the street were working over the pool foot by foot. The Think Tank had thought of a diver, too.

Ganelon had the receiver off the hook before the end of the first ring. "Jouvet here," said Jouvet. "The records show the following unidentified bodies found in the Frascati Fountain and buried in Poitier's Field: men—1801, 1833, 1868, 1906,

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and 1937; women—1803, 1829 1871, 1910, and 1925." Jouvet paused. "Insufficient data to permit a scientific conclusion. How many bodies, for example, were found in the other fountains during the same period? Is there a corelation between the bodies and solar storms or barometric pressure or stock-market fluctuations? Et cetera. Et cetera. Further studies are mandatory." Jouvet sighed. "An old man is foolish to get involved in the scientific approach. It could take years."

"In the meantime," said Ganelon, "could you represent the agency at the collecting of the coins tonight and then accompany Apollinaris from the fountain to the bank?"

In the next hour the rain slackened. A few gamblers on their way to the Casino dropped coins in Ganelon's hat for luck. Enough for a sandwich. *Waltzing Matilda* evoked coins from some late-arriving Australian tourists. Enough for a few cigarettes.

As the tiny stock of money grew, Ganelon tussled with logic. Evidently the thief needed light. Yet he didn't operate in the daytime. Evidently he needed artificial light. And this brought Ganelon back to the floodlights again. Why would they have to be on before the fountain could be robbed?

Mouton held his palm out the phone booth door and snapped his fingers. Bruno gave him a 50-centime piece from Ganelon's hat. "God bless you, sir," said Ganelon.

"It's cocktail hour for Myshkin," said Mouton, when he'd made his call. "But Fong and Brunner have an idea. Maybe the thief has fitted a trained sewer rat with special teeth so it can nip through that grille and carry off money in its cheeks."

"Aw, come on, Jo Jo. The Think Tank's getting punchy," said Bruno, as he pocketed the coins remaining in Ganelon's hat. ("God bless you, sir," said Ganelon.)

"The sewer's your department," said Mouton. "Check it out."

Ganelon struck up a Gilbert and Sullivan medley as they left. His bow arm moved automatically across the flexing saw blade. Behind the dark glasses the great detective was deep in thought. That, of course, was it. The thief didn't need light. But he did need the floodlight—plus the grille across the bottom of the pool.

It was now 12:15. Mouton and his men converged on Apollinaris and his hook-and-ladder as it arrived for the collection. Jouvet appeared at the same time, wearing a fedora and a belted raincoat. Ganelon shook his head. Apparently the old Inspector had decided to try the two-fisted ap-

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proach. Shouldering two Strongarm men aside, he introduced himself to Apollinaris and patted Miss Billie and Miss Mitzi on the knees.

When the multimillionaire had swept out the fountain, everyone drove off to the bank. A minute later the floodlights went out and the policeman headed home. Ganelon picked up his empty cap, tucked the bow and saw under his arm, and tapped his way out of the square.

Fifteen minutes later a shadow slipped across the square. Passing under a street light it became, for an instant, the figure of a man, naked except for a loincloth. It was Ganelon in the briefest of his disguises—dark-gray body-paint from head to toe. He stepped into the pool and pulled himself up on the back of an unoccupied stone dolphin. Neptune now had another demigod of the sea.

Ganelon didn't have long to wait. First came the squeak of old hinges. Then someone passed from behind the cascade and slipped into the water. A moment later a head bobbed to the surface in the middle of the pool. It vanished and reappeared several times.

Then a figure emerged from the water about a foot from the motionless Ganelon: a young woman in a bikini and bathing cap, carrying a wicker basket filled with coins. She went to the edge of the fountain where the young Swiss with the mustache came out of the shadows to meet her. They embraced and spoke in whispers. Then the Swiss walked out of the square and the woman returned behind the cascade. She had exchanged her wicker basket full of coins for a bag of groceries.

Ganelon started to dismount to follow her when the wind shifted. He froze, his eyes searching the shadows of the square. Bruno had returned from the sewer. The Strongarm man stepped out of the darkness. With a quick glance at the cascade he strode after the young Swiss.

Dripping with water from the cascade, Ganelon crossed a dark room piled with scrap metal toward a vaguely lit stone staircase. The steps led to a second room containing two large four-posters, a wooden cradle with rockers, and an iron stove. Sounds from above led him up two more flights, past a workroom smelling of acetylene.

The fourth room was crowded with bronze figures: medieval soldiers and Moors, haloed saints, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, representations of various virtues and vices, the Nine Muses, the Ten Commandments, and others, all set into a spiral track on the floor. The woman—she now wore a yellow

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raincoat over her bikini—was working on one of the figures with a file. "Miss Swartzwald, I presume," said Ganelon.

She swung around and stared open-mouthed at what looked like a fugitive from the fountain statuary.

When Ganelon had introduced himself, the girl regained her composure. "Yes, I'm Heidi Swartzwald," she said defiantly. "Put me in jail and throw the key away. But the money's mine. It's my dowry, willed to me by my father and six generations of Swartzwalds."

"So Mathias Swartzwald didn't run away," said Ganelon.

Her laughter walked a line between anger and tears. "Granted he had a poor head for business," she said. "Granted his man-hour projections per mechanical figure were unrealistic, his cost estimates absurdly low, and his choice of subcontractors—they kept going bankrupt on him—poor. But old Mathias was still a great craftsman and the fountain was his lifework.

"But the Frascatis said, 'No more money. No more extensions. Finish the mechanical figures by a certain date or go to jail for breach of contract.' Old Mathias knew he couldn't finish his work and redeem the family name in prison. So the night before the impossible deadline he and his wife moved in here.

"When Wilhelm, his son, was graduated from clock school in Switzerland he came to live in the clock as well, bringing with him a Swiss wife. Father and son hoped to complete the work in a few years. But then old Mathias died."

"And they put his body in the fountain," said Ganelon.

"How could he be buried legally without his identity becoming known?" asked Heidi. "After that a fountain burial became a kind of Swartzwald family tradition.

"Working alone, Wilhelm completed all the parts for the figures. As his father had done, he gave each part a number and wrote the number in a book plus where each part went. But before he could begin the assembling work, some plague or other carried him off. His son Wolfgang, also a clock-school graduate, had to hurry back from Switzerland with his family.

"That's when tragedy really struck. Wolfgang's little son—my great-grandfather—decided to reenact Napoleon's retreat from Moscow with his toy soldiers. A stickler for realism, the little tot simulated a blizzard by tearing the book with all the numbers into little pieces.

"Suddenly we had thousands of parts—wheels and cogs, nodding heads, pointing fingers, shrugging shoulders, legs that marched, legs that minced—but we didn't know

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which went where. Three generations of Swartzwalds broke their hearts trying to puzzle out the whole mess.

"Just look at this, Monsieur Ganelon," said Heidi, putting her hand on the bronze figure of a portly man sitting cross-legged in a chair and gazing up at the ceiling with his fingers laced behind his head. "This is the one that drove my father to despair. Sloth, one of the Seven Deadly Sins. It's full of all kinds of moving wheels inside, but nothing happens. 'Sloth doesn't work!' my father used to sob."

Suddenly a beam of light fell across the wall. It came from a peephole in the door through which the shepherdess made her hourly appearance. "The floodlights," said Heidi in a puzzled voice. "Someone's turned them on."

Ganelon jumped to the peephole. Below, men in homburgs and camel's-hair coats were spilling out of the Strongarm limousine. Mouton and Bruno opened the trunk compartment. Bruno reached inside and pulled the bloody head of the young Swiss into view.

"They've got Jean-Jacques, my fiancé!" said Heidi who had come to share the peephole with Ganelon. "Who are they?"

Ganelon explained about his detective-criminal race with the Strongarm Corporation. "Will Jean-Jacques talk?" he asked.

"I'm sure he will," she said. "He's really a very chatty and outgoing person. And just full of funny stories."

In fact, Jean-Jacques seemed to be talking so freely that Bruno had to hit him on the head and close the trunk compartment to shut him up.

"They shouldn't do that," insisted Heidi. "Jean-Jacques has claustrophobia. That's why he didn't come in here to live with us when mother's death brought me back from clock school. Oh, at first it wasn't too bad. On rainy nights when I didn't have to play shepherdess, Jean-Jacques would distract the policeman so I could slip out of the fountain and be with him. But since father died, the best we've been able to do is steal a few sweet moments together when he brings the groceries and exchange loving glances when I make my appearances on the hour."

At a command from Mouton, Bruno had stepped into the pool and was now almost chest-deep in the water, heading straight for the cascade. Abruptly he pitched face first into the water. The surface of the pool churned for a moment. Then Bruno reappeared, struggling to his feet. He strained to move forward again, fell over sideways, and disappeared under the water once more.

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"The Strongarm people wear steel caps on their shoes," said Ganelon. "Convenient for kicking a man when he's down, but clumsy for walking across an electromagnet."

Bruno came to the surface again, splashed to the edge of the pool, and crawled out in stockinged feet, gesturing furiously.

"Getting me my dowry cost my father his life," said Heidi. "First he tried the baby-shoe bronzing business. But there was just no money in that. Then he caught pneumonia from the hours he spent in the water wrapping the crossbars on the underside of the grille with wire and hooking into the current from the floodlights."

"A very ingenious man," said Ganelon.

"Yes," said Heidi proudly. "When the fountain was swept out, some steel coins stuck to the grille."

"Except for the time Apollinaris arrived late—after the floodlights and your magnet had been turned off," said Ganelon.

A banging echoed up the stairs. Mouton's men were trying to force their way in. But Ganelon had bolted the cascade door behind him. "We'll be safe enough here until morning," he said. "When the policeman comes on duty I'll have to turn you over to him."

Heidi nodded. "It's ironic really," she said. "Except for a final touch or two, the mechanical figures are ready to work and the Swartzwald name will be redeemed. And pretty soon, Jean-Jacques and I would have had enough money to set ourselves up in business. He is a master taxidermist and I am a master clockmaker. Together we planned on revolutionizing the Swiss Cuckoo-clock industry which has been resting on its laurels for three centuries. Little toy birds, indeed! We intend to design a series of clocks whose form and function determine the bird. For example, an alarm clock would contain a rooster; a ship's clock, a salty old parrot; a Grandfather clock, a bald eagle or a coot. Real birds, each one a masterpiece of the taxidermist's art."

Heidi looked at her wrist watch. "Time to get ready to play the shepherdess," she said, crossing over to a costume of bronzed cloth.

"Miss Swartzwald," protested Ganelon, "step out that door and you're dead and the national security of San Sebastiano is in gravest peril."

"Well, don't blame me," said Heidi. "All this was old Mathias' idea, not mine. Maybe he wanted to give the Frascatis something for their money. Maybe he was inordinately proud of a rheumatic condition called Swartzwald Elbow that runs in our family and forecasts the weather with ex-

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traordinary accuracy. All I know is that a Swartzwald has gone through that door on the hour for two hundred years." She took a firm grip on her shepherd's crook. "Don't try and stop me."

Ganelon chewed his lip, remembering the words of Father Sylvanus: "Alas, my son, not even the *via felix* can make a woman reasonable."

"All right," said Ganelon, "what does the Swartzwald Elbow say, weatherwise?"

Heidi grabbed an elbow and closed her eyes. "There is a high-pressure ridge moving in from the north-northeast, bringing generally cloudy conditions and intermittent showers to the San Sebastiano area," she said. "Temperatures will range from seasonable to below seasonable. Morning fog in the low-lying areas will make driving conditions hazardous."

"Technically speaking then, it's man-in-the-slicker weather," insisted the detective. "So if someone has to go out there like a duck in a shooting gallery, it will be me. But let's see if we can't confuse the issue a bit."

As the clock struck the hour, Mouton and his men raised their guns to greet the shepherdess. But Pride swaggered out the door instead, followed by Covetousness bowed down by material possessions and his hand in Pride's hip pocket. Next came Lust (out of respect for the women and children in the audience, old Mathias had represented him as a Peeping Tom with a stepladder), and then Anger who threw his bronze hat down and jumped on it with a gnashing of teeth.

Strongarm jaws dropped as Gluttony waddled out, alternately raising a bronze leg of lamb and a bronze bottle to his fat lips. Envy followed, eating his heart out as he watched Gluttony eat. Sloth came next, followed by Ganelon in a bronzed slicker and nor'wester.

"I am Hopeless Resignation," he thought. "The Eighth Deadly Sin."

"Come on, you guys. Check them out!" shouted Mouton.

Bruno sprang to life. His first shot struck Pride's inflated chest. The men cheered the satisfying *bong* and raised their guns again. Bruno waved them down. His next shot got Covetousness between the shifty eyes. Lust, going up and down the ladder, was more elusive. Bruno missed it twice before scoring a direct hit just as the figure passed through the other door.

For a brief moment Ganelon thought he might get across alive. But Bruno snapped off two quick shots—*bong, bong.* Anger and Gluttony were checked out. Envy was easy and Sloth a sitting duck—*bong, bong.* Ganelon was still too far from the door to try a dash for it.

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"All together on this last one!" shouted Mouton impatiently. Ganelon faced the upturned guns with a mechanical shrug. "Ready!" shouted Mouton. Ganelon wondered if tradition didn't call for him to be offered a final cigarette. "Aim!" shouted Mouton. Ganelon braced himself for the shots.

Instead, two policeman on bicycles glided out of the shadows. 'Your papers, gentlemen, if you please," said one of them sternly The camel's-hair firing squad lowered its guns. Ganelon passed through the other door which closed behind him with a bang.

Once inside, Ganelon put his eye to the peephole. Down below, the police were examining Mouton's license to exterminate pigeons. Satiisfied, they saluted smartly and pedaled away.

''Miss Swartzwald," said Ganelon testily, "do you expect me to repeat that little performance on the hour until morning?"

"I didn't start the stupid tradition," said Heidi who was fussing over the damage the bullets had done to the Seven Deadly Sins. "But if you don't go, I will. I told you—the show must go on."

"That's why we must take the offensive," said Ganelon. "That's why we have to invite them in."

He opened the door and stood back.

The Strongarm men scuffed out their cigarettes when Bruno returned, at the wheel of the hook-and-ladder. Mouton was the first one up the ladder and onto the platform across which Ganelon and the Seven Deadly Sins had paraded a few minutes before. Wary of a trick, Mouton waited until the others had joined him before moving cautiously toward the open door.

The whir of machinery greeted his approach and four bronze figures in medieval costume jerked into view. They arranged themselves shoulder to shoulder and raised trumpets to their lips. Behind them, the little army of San Sebastiano filed out the door, led by Guido Frascati bearing his famous two-handed sword, Invictus. Mouton and the Strongarm men bunched together uneasily.

Then the door behind them sprang open and the Moorish host under Akbar the Cruel squealed out beneath infidel banners. The Battle of the Cornichon was about to be re-enacted. Mouton's men formed a circle around him, some firing into the Christians, others into the Moors. But both armies advanced with slow relentlessness. The firing became wilder. Mouton shouted for everyone to break for the ladder. But at that moment both armies raised their weapons and charged.

Mouton and his men disappeared in a forest of clashing swords and scimitars, spears and

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battleaxes, mechanical arms, legs, knees, and elbows. When the Moors, conforming to history and to old Mathias' cogs and wheels, turned and ran, they left a battlefield littered with dented homburgs and unconscious Strongarm men. Only Mouton and Bruno escaped. Battered and bruised, they retreated on all fours along with the vanquished Moors fleeing back through the door from which they had come.

Once inside, Bruno was the first to untangle himself from the Saracen feet. His mouth was bloody where he'd been struck by the flat of a sword, and one eye was swollen shut. He spat out a tooth, cursed, and made a staggering lunge at Ganelon. The detective sidestepped agilely. He caught his attacker around the waist and applied a quick hiplift that brought the Strongarm man's body parallel to the f l o o r. Ganelon tipped him this way and that in a skillful redistribution of his four body humors. Then he sat Bruno down. The bull-necked man looked up from the floor with a shy grin.

"Thanks a lot, there," he said good-naturedly. The *via felix* had triumphed again. The Strongarm man pumped Ganelon's hand. "Bruno's the name, Mayhem's the game," he said. Blushing, he added, "But my mother always called me her Little Cabbage. Been years since anyone called me that."

Before Ganelon could oblige, Mouton stepped forward, waving his Hunsecker-Bowles. The ripe, blue lump on his forehead had come from the studded mace which Robert, Bishop of San Sebastiano, had wielded instead of a sword because the Church forbade the shedding of blood by Men of the Cloth.

"Stand over there with the girl, Ganelon," Mouton ordered. "Now here's the story. Bruno and I catch the girl stealing. She grabs a gun and tries to escape just as you arrive—better late than never. She shoots you. I shoot her. Bruno will back me up. Right, Bruno?"

"Hello there, Jo Jo," said Bruno who was following the proceedings with childlike interest from the floor.

"As for the guy in the trunk of the car," said Mouton, "we stick his head in a bucket of cement and drop him off a pier. Right, Bruno?"

Bruno winked at Ganelon and Heidi. "Whatever you say, Jo Jo," he smiled, adding in a stage whisper, "Old Jo Jo isn't really a bad egg. Underneath it all he's got a heart of gold."

Mouton whirled. "Have you gone nuts, Bruno?" he demanded. "Who says I've got a heart of gold? Who says I'm not rotten to the core? Are you going to back me up or not?"

"All the way, Jo Jo, old bud-

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dy," said Bruno agreeably. "Provided it's okay with our friends here. So what's your complaint? Come on. Admit you're not a bad egg, not really."

Mouton lashed at the smiling face with his pistol. But Bruno grabbed his arm and wouldn't let go. "Admit you've got a heart of gold," he coaxed. "Call me your Little Cabbage."

Before Mouton could get his arm free, Ganelon had applied another hiplift. In a moment the Strongarm chieftain was on the floor beside a grinning Bruno. Mouton sat there pensively for a second or two and then turned to his companion.

"Bruno," he said benignly, "have you ever wondered what life is all about? I mean *really* all about?"

Ganelon, still wearing the bronzed slicker, stood at the edge of the fountain beside a beaming Apollinaris. "Since Miss Swartzwald and her fiancé have agreed to return the stolen money, I hope you will see your way to dropping the charges against them," said the detective. "One can't help admiring a family that has lived inside a clock for six generations."

"Agreed," said Apollinaris. "As a matter of fact, in return for a controlling interest in their little business enterprise, I intend to finance it myself. Apollinaris Stuffed Clocks, Unlimited. How does that sound?

"By the way," said the multimillionaire, "your Inspector Jouvet was a godsend. I invited him back to the Fireman's Ball with us. As luck would have it, he and Miss Billie were taking a bit of air on the terrace when he noticed the Strongarm people stealing the hook-and-ladder which I had just that evening donated to the Fire Department. A fine person, Inspector Jouvet, and a great one with the ladies."

"Apparently so," thought Ganelon. Jouvet, who was over by the multimillionaire's limousine letting Miss Billie and Miss Mitzi feel his muscles, had just presented his expense account. It seemed the the young ladies drank nothing but champagne cocktails.

Apollinaris looked up at the clock and rubbed his hands together with delight. "Do you know what I'm going to do?" he asked. "Inspired by the television industry, I am going to dress up some of those marvelous mechanical figures in sandwich-boards and rent the space out for advertising. Sloth, for example, might be used to promote one of those patent medicines for iron-poor blood." The clock struck the hour and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse appeared. "Pestilence, War, Famine, and Death," said Apollinaris enthusiastically. "Any insurance

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company would jump at the chance to sponsor them."

The multimillionaire offered Ganelon his bejeweled cigarette case. The detective snapped it open. There were no cigarettes, only an inscription: *To Ambrose Ganelon IV from a grateful Apollo Apollinaris.*

"I noticed how much you admired my little cigarette case," said the multimillionaire. "Take it instead of your fee. It is fourteen-carat gold and those, of course, are matched sapphires and rubies."

Ganelon sighed inwardly. Even without the inscription he could not sell or pawn the case without revealing the secret of his poverty.

Weary and dejected, Ganelon set out for home. As he passed the phone booth in the middle of the deserted square the phone rang. On impulse Ganelon picked up the receiver. "Jo Jo Mouton, please," said the operator. "Chicago calling."

"Tell Count Myshkin that Mouton is in jail for stealing a hook-and-ladder and assaulting eight policemen," said Ganelon. (The effects of the *via felix* had worn off as the eight policemen were putting Mouton and Bruno into a patrol car.)

A new voice broke in on the line. "Monsieur Ganelon?" it rapsed. "Myshkin here. How much like old times having my designs frustrated by a Ganelon!" Myshkin paused. "I assume my designs *have* been frustrated."

"You'd better believe it," said Ganelon.

"I do, I do," said Myshkin. "But multimillionaires are like buses—there's always another one along soon. My dear Ganelon, tell me: did the solution to our little riddle have anything to do with the floodlights and the grille on the bottom of the pool?"

Ganelon explained about the electromagnet.

"Alas," said Myshkin in mock despair. "I was on the verge of the truth earlier this evening. I had gone to Aristotle's, a pleasant Greek night club where the sound of the basouki and breaking glass stimulates my mind much more than those idiotic spitballing sessions. There I was, fitting ideas together this way and that when I became intrigued by the floodlights and the grille. But before I could finalize my thinking, the Incredible Tamara, a bellydancer of no small skill, began her number and I quite lost my train of thought. I'm afraid I have too many vices to be a real villain. Ah, well, until the next time."

The streets were silent. San Sebastiano, the free world, and Apollo Apollinaris slept in peace. The Strongarm Corporation had been deafeated. Ganelon headed homeward, his mind already

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elsewhere. Perhaps, if he pried loose a jewel from the cigarette case, Babar the Elegant could fence it for him.

"My dear Babar," thought Ganelon, rehearsing the conversation in his mind, "I have a service to ask. A friend has a small stone—quite honestly come by, I assure you—that he wishes to dispose of through unconventional channels."

Why doesn't he take it to a regular dealer? Why, indeed? Ganelon racked his brain.

"A good question, Babar. To answer it we must cast our minds back one hundred years to when the Khyber region lay at the mercy of a secret society of Pathan assassins whose leader ruled by virture of a sacred dagger encrusted with matched rubies and sapphires . . ."

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GERALD KERSH

This is one of the treasure-trove of manuscripts found in the late Gerald Kersh's effects. So far as can be checked, these newly discovered stories have never been published anywhere in the world. We are deeply grateful to Mrs. Kersh for sending the manuscripts to us for first publication in EQMM—so that Gerald Kersh's inimitable stories can keep coming to you at intervals, so that Gerald can, through his work, be with us a long time . . .

Here is Gerald Kersh spinning one of his inimitable yarns—puckish, captivating, irresistible . . .

THE SCAR

by GERALD KERSH

WRAGG WAS ONE OF THOSE little people whom Nature seems to have designed in order to convince us that things might be worse—a tiny, fleshless, wispy man more than 60 years old, and dressed in a suit of vivid checks which had belonged to someone at least 70 pounds heavier than himself. The shoulders of the jacket reached three or four inches down each arm, and when he waved his hands the sleeves flapped like the wings of some ragged, fantastic bat. In place of a shirt he usually wore a sky-blue polo jersey, darned on the breast with red rug-wool. His trousers were so long that he was able to strap them under a pair of ordinary black-cotton socks, and his feet were encased in bizarre light-gray shoes decorated with little blue hearts—survivals of the Brighter Clothes for Men craze of the twenties.

It was easy to tell by his face that he had some connection with the stage. He had that pasty, leathery complexion which you may see in innumerable men who lounge at the doors of the

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theatrical agents' offices in Charing Cross Road: the small fry of the old music halls, and the comedians who used to bawl mildewed jokes and tuneless songs for 40 years between Morecambe and Margate, never earning more than the barest of livings. You could see, in the face of little Wragg, the spoilage of half a century of drafty dressing rooms and the stuffiness and h o t - w h i t e gaslights of grimy little theaters; the ravages of many long fasts broken only by evil theatrical boarding-house cookery.

You could perceive, in Wragg's interminable, rambling monologues and the nervous hurry with which he forced the words out, the habit of desperate impromptu in the teeth of hostile audiences. His vocal cords which had strained against the hissing of multitudes seemed to have turned to frayed string: in order to force any sound out of them, he had to exert his entire body. Yet he never stopped talking, in an ingratiating tone, while his toothless mouth remained fixed in the mirthless grin of the half-starved "pro" whom the manager sternly orders to "look cheerful."

He picked up a livelihood at the time by tearing paper patterns in front of theater queues, but he was not strong enough in the fingers and his patterns usually shook out into shapelessness. But this, in Wragg, had a humorous result: just as one expects the unsophisticated guest, in the film, to drink out of his fingerbowl, so one expected little Wragg to bungle his paper tearing. Nobody laughed at Wragg's patter, but everybody laughed at Wragg.

He occupied a room next to mine. Like most of Busto's rooming-house tenants, he did not stay long; he came and went, dragging with him down his dreary road a battered cardboard attaché case with a string handle and a disgusting old violin, black with dirt and white with r e s i n, passionately clasped under his right arm. I got to know him through this instrument.

He insisted on playing the opening bars of *The Blue Danube* on it over and over again one night when I was trying to go to sleep. I protested. He shouted, "All you people know is the pub and the pawnshop—not g o o d music!" I went into his room to argue the point and saw him sitting up in bed and torturing the screeching strings with a milk bottle, which he was using instead of a bow.

"See that?" he said. "There's only one man in the world who could do that, apart from myself, and that was Dan Gregory. He could play a Russian dance on the violin and turn a somersault at the same time. Kreisler plays a couple of straight tunes and gets thousands for it. Dan Gregory

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gets nothing—and he could play the violin with a matchstick. But they don't appreciate art in this country. Pub and pawnshop, that's all they know.

"Look at me! You've heard of Monty Wragg? Monty Wragg, Versatile Comedian—that's me. I used to do a double turn—Wragg and Bone—a scream, I don't mind telling you. And they were real names. My partner's name was Agatha Bone. A great girl! You can talk about your Greta Garbos—that girl Agatha had *talent.* You don't get girls like that now. She chucked a great theatrical career when we were at the Heysham Palace of Variety to go into domestic service—she was a good cook, too. Listen to me, laddie: that girl could cook, she could do trick cycling stunts, she could sing, she could dance, she could play the cornet, she could do elocution—everything. What can Greta Garbo do? Now ask yourself, is there any justice?"

It was impossible to stop him. His tongue rattled on like clockwork for at least 30 minutes until he stopped to cough. I took that opportunity of saying, "Well, I won't be able to get to sleep after this. Come into my room and have a cup of tea."

He bounded out of bed and put on his clownish trousers. As I put on my kettle on the gas ring and took a pork pie out of a paper bag, he watched me with hungry eyes. His mouth watered. He gulped once or twice, and then began again, "Nice of you. Not many people would think of it. All they know is pub and pawnshop. No hospitality—that's a thing of the past in this country.

"Now when I was in Ostende it was 'Monsieur' this and 'Monsieur' that, and 'Do you find your bed comfortable, Monsieur Wragg?' But here? 'Ger! Ger!'—that's all they can say. Some people look down on foreigners, but not me. We're all brothers. I know some people in Ramsgate, and they had a little boy thirteen years old who did all the scrubbing while his mother carried on all day with fellas. Now . . ."

He took a mouthful of pie and swallowed it hastily. "No," he said, "they got no manners here. Savages, that's what they are. Once, when I was at the Olympia Hackney, a fella threw a ginger-beer bottle at me. Missed me by inches. And just look at this—"

He lowered his head, pulled aside his soiled white hair, uncovering a frightful scar which divided the top of his head. The bone underneath must have been dented at least half an inch.

I said, "I'm interested in scars. How did you get that one?"

"I'll tell you, if you like. That scar's got a history."

"Where did you get it? The war?"

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"War? No, not this one. The war? Ha, that was nothing! No, I got this one up in Yorkshire. I was unconscious two weeks with it, as true as I'm sitting here. All my brains came out, almost. P'raps that's why I'm crazy now—ha, ha, ha! Somebody done it with a butcher's cleaver."

"Fight?"

"No—attempted murder."

"Over a woman?"

"How did you guess? You'd hardly believe it, but I used to be much sought after by women. You can take it from me—good looks and big chests don't carry no weight with women. Charm, that's what counts—personality and brains. I could talk to 'em. You'd hardly believe it, but I could talk any woman off her feet in those days. They used to fall in love with me, head over heels. I could have had my pick of them."

"But you never married?"

"No. I nearly did, once or twice. Once I was within a few days of going to the altar, but—"

"But you were going to tell me about that scar."

"—oh, yes! I was coming to that. Once I start talking I run on and on and get right away from the subject. Oh yes . . . Well, I was up in Yorkshire, in a little town called Hudford. See! A proper little North Country town where the people don't know a thing. You know, a population of about forty thousand, and hardly one of them had been to London in his life. I ask you!

"Well, that was over twenty years ago, and I don't mind telling you I was somebody in those days. Three or four pounds a week on the average was nothing to me. I was in partnership with a fella called Walters, and we were putting over the famous Wragg and Walters act—pretty hot stuff; it brought the house down—a real bit of class.

"Well, as it happened, the manager of the Hudford Hippodrome kicked the bucket, and as they wanted somebody with brains and personality they made me a firm offer to take over the management; which I did.

"I got a very nice front room over a butcher's shop, with full board and laundry, for a pound a week, and settled in. I was somebody. Everybody used to point me out when I crossed the Circus, and all the millhands and yokels used to say, 'Good day to you, Mr. Wragg.' And I don't mind telling you, every blessed girl in the town fell for me like a ton of bricks. I was over forty—you wouldn't think I was over sixty now, would you?—and something to look at. I used to go to church every Sunday for the sake of appearances, and I got known.

"Well, among the girls who fell

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in love with me was one called Mary Curtis. She used to come along to church with her sister, a girl called Agnes, and I don't mind telling you she couldn't take her eyes off me. They were both very nice girls, twins, about thirty-eight or thirty-nine years old, and although they looked pretty much alike, I never saw a pair of twins with such different characters. You know what I mean: you usually find that twin sisters think and dress similar, but these two were as different as chalk from cheese.

"Mary was my type, a lovely girl; big-built, nice shape, light wavy hair, nice eyes, and full of life—bubbling over with it. She liked a bit of color in her dress. The way she got herself up was quite stylish for a little town: blues and pinks, and silks and satins, a nice enameled watch, hats that were something to *look* at. One of 'em had half a Bird of Paradise on it, and you don't get things like that for twopence-halfpenny. She liked a song and a dance, too, and wasn't keen on church and all that kind of thing—in fact, she only used to go to see me there.

"But the other one, Agnes—Gor bless me soul!—how different she was! She could have made something of herself, but she preferred to look like a blooming schoolteacher. Hair parted in the middle, and dragged right back into a bun as big as that teapot; black dress, black gloves, black jet beads, black velvet band round her neck; and never a smile on her face. A proper misery, I tell you.

"Well, I got to know Mary through her coming to the Hippodrome. I did a turn myself, and she used to take a one-and-sixpenny seat in the front row of the stalls, just to get a good look at me. She inspired me, I don't mind telling you.

"You don't get girls like that nowadays. All they know is Lipsticks and Picture Palaces—no reality about 'em. Nothing like that about Mary. She had intelligence—she wouldn't have given a 'thank you' for your Clark Gables and your Joe E. Browns. She knew what was what: she appreciated genuine *talent*.

"Well, we started going about a bit together, and I began to call at the house for tea. I don't mind telling you, I brought a bit of life into that house. I showed those girls a thing or two. I talked to 'em. I entertained 'em till you would have thought their eyes would pop out. And I even got a laugh out of Agnes. Yes, I even made Agnes smile, and you would have needed a blooming burglar's jimmy to bend up the corners of her mouth.

"Well, after a time Agnes took to me more and more until she even started coming to the Hip-

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podrome every Monday evening, and the whole town started talking about it. You know what they are in these small towns—they've got nothing better to do than talk, talk, talk. But I could see with half an eye that Agnes had also fallen in love with me. It's all very nice, having all these young women fall in love with you, but Agnes wasn't my type. It was Mary for me, not blooming black beads and religion.

"But you know what women are—they can't help falling in love, and they can't fall in love without getting jealous. So the result was that Agnes and Mary, who'd got on together perfectly well up to then, they started bickering. I could see the coolness springing up between them until it made me uncomforteble to be with the two of 'em together. It sort of damped me down. There were silences. I'm not used to silences—I like a bit of intelligent conversation. Then, when one day me and Mary announced to Agnes that we were going to get properly engaged, Agnes gets up from the table, bursts into tears, and slams out of the room."

"Yes—" said Wragg, with a grin of pride, fishing in his hip pocket—"they used to lose their heads over me something terrible. This was me, then." He handed me a faded photograph.

I looked at it with interest, half expecting to see some Casanova of the early twentieth century, some Maurice Costello or Francis X. Bushman. Instead, I saw an ordinary grinning, straw-hatted "professional," somewhat the worse for wear, and apparently not quite sober; skinny, with a silly-looking grin, striking an attitude with a whangee cane against a cardboard column supporting a flowerpot.

"Very nice," I said. "Go on."

"Ah, yes . . . After that they quarreled in real earnest. I never saw anything like it—they just wouldn't have anything more to do with one another. Before I'd come into their lives they used to go everywhere together, except that Mary used to go to the theater oftener than Agnes, and Agnes used to go to church more regular than Mary. But now—Gor bless my soul!—they were dead enemies. They avoided each other.

"Mary stopped going to church because she wouldn't share the same pew with Agnes. I had to keep it up, for the sake of my reputation in the town, and I used to see Agnes, with her nose in the prayer book, never even looking in my direction. And whenever I went to the house to tea, Agnes would keep out of sight. She wouldn't sit at the same table with us alone.

"Well, that suited me down to the ground. But all this enmity upset Mary a good deal; she wanted to get away from it. She

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said to me one day, she said, 'Let's hurry up and get married, and get away from it all. Let's get married quickly'—those very words. I didn't mind a bit. I was forty, and it was time I settled down. And Mary was a nice girl—bright, cheerful, nice-looking, a good housekeeper, and two hundred a year in her own right. Her old man had been a master builder. He built the Town Hall and the Library. Pots of money. She was a lovely girl. Her and Agnes had a matter of eight or nine quid a week between them. Mary had a nice bit in the bank, too. You don't get girls like that nowadays. No reality about 'em.

"All right. 'Marry you?' I says. 'Only name the day.' 'Now,' she says. So I starts getting ready. We made arrangements. She insisted on paying the preliminaries. She handed me twenty-five quid in golden sovereigns. I got myself a lovely new black cutaway suit for four guineas—you got a better suit for four guineas then than you get for ten now—and I had the banns put up. And believe me or believe me not, laddie, they were read out, and the wedding was booked to come on the following Tuesday week. Yes, I come as near to it as that!"

"And why didn't you?" I asked.

"I'm coming to that. It was all on account of Agnes. On the Tuesday after the banns had been read for the third time, Agnes had to go to the Women's Guild. It was about seven o'clock in the evening. I was busy at the Hippodrome, and Mary was at home. See? Well, Agnes leaves the house, and just as she steps into the road, along comes some blasted lunatic at the double with a handcart and knocks her down and breaks her ankle.

"Well, they picks her up and takes her to her door, and she starts struggling and screaming: 'I won't! I won't be taken home! I won't! I won't!' But they puts that down to her being delirious on account of shock, and gets the door open, and takes her in, and calls for Mary. But Mary isn't there. They looks upstairs, they looks downstairs, they sends to the theater to see if she's there, and then they looks in the cellar—and there they finds her. She'd been dead for five weeks."

"No!" I said.

"I'm telling you," said Wragg, "five weeks! Her sister had poisoned her with arsenic and put her down in the cellar, and then put on her clothes and impersonated her. I would have married her without knowing the difference. Agnes, with her hair fluffed up, and bright clothes, and a smile on her face, looked as like her sister as two peas in a pod."

"Good God! And what happened to Agnes?"

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"Oh, she died soon after they took her to prison. Took poison. Murder and suicide—that's what a woman'll do for love . . . And do you know what? I'm damned if I know now whether it was Mary who murdered Agnes or Agnes who murdered Mary. *She* said nothing. Nobody knew. And I've often wondered . . ."

"How terrible!"

"Terrible is right. If only it could have been discovered a week later!"

"What difference would that have made?"

"What difference! I would have come into eight or nine quid a week *and* the house—romance is very nice indeed, but you can't eat romance, you can't drink romance, and romance won't keep you warm in the winter. Now eight or nine quid a week—"

"But where does the scar come in?"

"What scar?"

"The one on your head."

"Oh—well, now! The way I ramble on! I was going to tell you about that in the first place, but once I get talking I sort of run on and on . . . The scar, you say? Now, that's a different story altogether—something really extra-ordinary. One of these days I'll tell you about that scar—really extra-ordinary!"

'O'

The solution to

MURDER IN MIAMI

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Chief Will Gentry's gaze followed Mike Shayne's forefinger pointing to the folded morning newspaper propped against the closed front door.

"Which one is the murderer, Mike?" the Chief asked.

"Charles Rowan." Shayne put a heavy hand on the husband's shoulder.

"That folded newspaper leaning against the door proves no one entered the house *since Rowan closed the door behind him at six thirty*—because the paper boy was cutting across the lawn to deliver it when Melzner picked Rowan up in front. His wife *must* have returned at 5:30 as Dinker claims. Rowan strangled her in a fit of jealous rage and then telephoned her brother to hurry over and provide him with an unwitting alibi."

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